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THE

WORKS

OF

DR. JOHN TILLOTSON,

LATE

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

WITH THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY

THO^{S}. BIRCH, M.A.

ALSO,

A COPIOUS INDEX, AND THE TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE CAREFULLY COMPARED.

IN TEN VOLUMES.—VOL. IX.

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SERMONS.

SERMON CCVII.

OF THE NECESSITY OF GOOD WORKS.

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.—TIT. iii. 8.

FROM these words I have proposed to handle these two points:

First, The certain truth or credibility of this saying or proposition, That they which have believed in God ought to be careful to maintain good works. This I have spoken to, and come now to the

Second, The great fitness and necessity of inculcating frequently upon all that profess themselves Christians, the indispensable necessity of the practice of the virtues of a good life. In the handling of this point, I shall do these two things:

First, I shall shew the great fitness and necessity of pressing upon people the indispensable necessity of the virtues of a good life. And,

Secondly, Answer an objection or two, to which the preaching of this kind of doctrine may seem liable. I begin with the

First of these, viz. To shew the great fitness and necessity of inculcating and pressing upon all Christians the indispensable necessity of the virtues of a good life. And this will appear to be very fit and necessary upon these two accounts:

I. Because men are so very apt to deceive themselves in this matter, and so hardly brought to that wherein religion mainly consists, viz. the practice of real goodness.

II. Because of the indispensable necessity of the thing to render us capable of the Divine favour and acceptance, and of the reward of eternal life and happiness.

I. Because men are so very apt to deceive themselves in this matter, and so hardly brought to that wherein religion mainly consists, viz. the practice of real goodness. They are extremely desirous to reconcile (if it be possible) the hopes of eternal happiness in another world, with a liberty to live as they list in this present world: they are loath to be at the trouble and drudgery of mortifying their lusts, and subduing and governing their passions, and bridling their tongues, and ordering their whole conversation aright, and practising all those duties which are comprehended in those two great commandments, the love of God and our neighbour. They would fain get into the favour of God, and make their calling and election sure, by some easier way, than by "giving all diligence, to add to their faith, virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and brotherly kindness, and charity."

The plain truth of the matter is, men had rather religion should be any thing, than what indeed it is, the thwarting and crossing of our vicious inclina-

tions, the curing of our evil and corrupt affections; the due care and government of our unruly appetites and passions, the sincere endeavour and constant practice of all holiness and virtue in our lives; and, therefore, they had much rather have something that might handsomely palliate and excuse their evil inclinations, than to extirpate them and cut them up: and rather than reform and amend their vicious lives, make God an honourable amends and compensation for them in some other way.

This hath been the way and folly of mankind in all ages, to defeat the great end and design of religion, and to thrust it by, by substituting something else in the place of it, which they hope may serve the turn as well, and which hath the appearance of as much devotion and respect, and perhaps of more cost and pains, than that which God requires of them. Men have ever been apt thus to impose upon themselves, and to please themselves with a conceit of pleasing God full as well, or better, by some other way, than that which he hath pitched upon and appointed for them; not considering that God is a great king, and will be observed and obeyed by his creatures in his own way; and that obedience to what he commands is better and more acceptable to him than any other sacrifice that we can offer, which he hath not required at our hands; that he is infinitely wise and good, and therefore the laws and rules which he has given us to live by, are more likely and certain means of our happiness, than any inventions and devices of our own.

Thus, I say, it hath been in all ages. The old world, after that general deluge which God sent to punish the raging wickedness and impiety of

men, by sweeping all mankind from off the face of the earth, excepting only one family, which was saved to be the seminary of a new and better race of men; I say, after this, the world in a short space fell off from the worship of the true God to the worship of idols and false gods; being unwilling to bring themselves to a conformity and likeness to the true God, they chose false gods like themselves, such as might not only excuse, but even countenance and abet, their lewd and vicious practices.

And when God had made a new revelation of himself to the nation of the Jews, and given them the chief heads and substance of the natural law written over again with his own finger in tables of stone, and many other laws concerning religious worship, and their civil conversation, suited and adapted to their present temper and condition; yet, how soon did their religion degenerate into external observances, purifications and washings, and a multitude of sacrifices, without any great regard to the inward and substantial parts of religion, and the practice of those moral duties and virtues, which were in the first place required of them, and without which all the rest found no acceptance with God. Hence are those frequent complaints in the prophets, that their religion was degenerated into form and ceremony, into oblations and sacrifices, the observance of fasts, and sabbaths, and new-moons; but had no power and efficacy upon their hearts and lives; was wholly destitute of inward purity and holiness, of all substantial virtues, and the fruits of righteousness in a good life. Thus God complains by the prophet Isaiah: (chap. i. 11, &c.) "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord? Bring no more

vain oblations. Incense is an abomination unto me, the new-moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet," &c. Upon these terms God declares himself ready to be reconciled to them, and to have mercy on them. But all their external services and sacrifices, separated from real goodness and righteousness, were so far from appeasing God's wrath, that they did but increase the provocation. And to the same purpose, (chap. lxvi. 2, 3.) "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man: he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighted in their abomination." (Jer. vi. 19, 20.) "Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it. To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba; and the sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt-offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me." They thought to please God with costly incense and sacrifices, whilst they rejected his law. And, (chap. vii. 4—6.) "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple

of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings ; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour ; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt : then will I cause you to dwell in this place." And, (ver. 8—10.) " Behold, ye trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not ; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations ?" This was to add impudence to all their other impieties, to think that the worship of God, and his holy temple, did excuse these gross crimes and immoralities. (Micah vi. 6—8.) There God represents the Jews as desirous to please God at any rate, provided their lusts and vices might be spared, and they might not be obliged to amend and reform their lives : " Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God ? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old ? will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, and with ten thousand rivers of oil ? shall I give my first-born for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul ?" All this they would willingly do : but all this will not do without real virtue and goodness. " He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ?"

And in the time of our blessed Saviour, those who pretended to be most devout among the Jews,

were wholly busied about their pretended traditions of washing of hands, and the outsides of their cups and dishes, and about the external and lesser things of the law, the tithing of mint, and anise, and cummin, and all manner of herbs, omitting in the mean time " the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith, and the love of God," as our Saviour describes their religion, (Matt. xxiii. 23.)

And after the clear revelation of the gospel, the best and most perfect institution that ever was, in the very beginning of Christianity, what licentious doctrines did there creep in, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and releasing men from all moral duties, and the virtues of a good life ; " by reason whereof the way of truth was evil spoken of," as St. Peter and St. Jude expressly tell us concerning the sect of the gnostics. And St. John, likewise, describes the same sect by their arrogant pretence to extraordinary knowledge and illumination, whilst they " walked in darkness," and allowed themselves in all manner of wickedness of life ; they pretended to perfection and righteousness, without keeping the commandments of God.

And in the next following age of Christianity, how was it pestered with a trifling controversy about the time of the observation of Easter, and with endless disputes and niceties about the doctrine of the trinity, and the two natures and wills of Christ! by which means the practice of Christianity was greatly neglected, and the main end and design of that excellent religion almost quite defeated and lost.

After this, when the mystery of iniquity began to shew itself, in the degeneracy of the Roman church from her primitive sanctity and purity, and in the affectation of an undue and boundless

power over other churches, the Christian religion began to be overrun with superstition, and the primitive fervour of piety and devotion was turned into a fierce zeal and contention about matters of no moment and importance; of which we have a most remarkable instance here in our own nation, when Austin the monk arrived here to convert the nation, and preach the gospel amongst us, as the church of Rome pretended; but against all faith and truth of history, which assures us, that Christianity was planted here among the Britons several ages before, and perhaps sooner than even at Rome itself; and not only so, but had got considerable footing among the Saxons before Austin the monk ever set foot amongst us; I say, when Austin the monk arrived here, the two great points of his Christianity were to bring the Britons to a conformity with the church of Rome in the time of Easter, and in the tonsure and shaving of the priests, after the manner of St. Peter, as they pretended, upon the crown of the head, and not of St. Paul, which was by shaving or cutting close the hair of the whole head, as from some vain and foolish tradition he pretended to have learned: the promoting of these two customs was his great errand and business, and the zeal of his preaching was spent upon these two fundamental points; in which, after very barbarous and bloody doings, he at last prevailed. And this is the conversion of England, so much boasted of by the church of Rome, and for which this Austin is magnified for so great a saint; when it is very evident, from the history of those times, that he was a proud, ignorant, turbulent, and cruel man, who, instead of first converting the nation to the faith of Christ, confounded the purity and simplicity of the Christ-

ian religion, which had been planted and established among us long before.

In latter ages, when the man of sin was grown up to his full stature, the great business of religion was the pope's absolute and universal authority over all Christians, even kings and princes, in order to spiritual matters; ecclesiastical liberties and immunities; and the exemption of the clergy, and all matters belonging to them, from the cognizance of the secular power; the great points which Thomas a Becket contended so earnestly for, calling it the cause of Christ, and in the maintenance whereof he persisted to the death, and was canonized as a saint and a martyr. And among the people, their piety consisted in the promoting of monkery, and founding and endowing monasteries: in infinite superstitions, foolish doctrines, and more absurd miracles to confirm them; in purchasing indulgences with money, and hearing of masses for the redemption of souls out of purgatory; in the idolatrous worship of saints and their relics and images, and especially of the blessed Virgin, which at last grew to that height, as to make up the greatest part of their worship and devotion both public and private. And indeed they have brought matters to that absurd pass, that one may truly say, that the whole business of their devotion is to teach men to worship images, and images to worship God. For to be present at Divine service and prayers celebrated in an unknown tongue, is not the worship of men and reasonable creatures, but of statues and images, which, though they be present in the place where this service is performed, yet they bear no part in it, being void of all sense and understanding of what is done. And indeed in their whole religion, such as it is, they

drive so strict a bargain with God, and treat him in so arrogant a manner by their insolent doctrine of the merit of good works, as if God were as much beholden to them for their service and obedience, as they are to him for the reward of it, which they challenge as of right and justice belonging to them. Nay, so high have they carried this doctrine, as to pretend not only to merit eternal life for themselves, but to do a great deal more in works of supererogation, for the benefit and advantage of others ; that is, when they have done as much as in strict duty they are obliged to, and thereby paid down a valuable consideration for heaven, and as much as in equal justice between God and man it is worth, the surplusage of their good works they put as a debt upon God, as so many bills of credit laid up in the treasury of the church, which the pope, by his pardons and indulgences, may dispense and place to whose account he pleaseth. And thus by one device or other they have enervated the Christian religion to that degree, that it hath quite lost its virtue and efficacy upon the hearts and lives of men, and instead of the fruits of real goodness and righteousness, it produceth little else but superstition and folly; or if it bring forth any fruits of charity, it is either so misplaced upon chimeras (as hiring of priests to say so many masses for the dead, to redeem their souls out of purgatory), that it signifies nothing ; or else the virtue of it is spoiled by the arrogant pretence of meriting by it. So apt have men always been to deceive themselves by an affected mistake of any thing for religion, but that which really and in truth is so! And this is that which the apostle St. Paul foretold would be the great miscarriage of the last times, that under a great pretence of religion

men should be destitute of all goodness, and abandoned to all wickedness and vice, "having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it," (2 Tim. iii. 5.)

And though things have been much better since that happy reformation from the corruptions and errors of popery, yet even among protestants the malice and craft of the devil hath prevailed so far, as to undermine, in a great measure, the necessity of a good life, by those luscious doctrines of the antinomians concerning free grace, and the justification of a sinner merely upon a confident persuasion of his being in a state of grace and favour with God, and consequently that the gospel dischargeth men from obedience to the laws of God, and all manner of obligation to the virtues of a good life; which doctrines, how false and absurd soever in themselves, and pernicious in their consequences, did not only prevail very much in Germany, a little after the beginning of the Reformation, but have since got too much footing in other places, and been too far entertained and cherished by some good men, who were not sufficiently aware of the error and danger of them. But blessed be God, the doctrine of our church, both in the articles and homilies of it, hath been preserved pure and free from all error and corruption in this matter on either hand, asserting the necessity of good works, and yet renouncing the merit of them in that arrogant sense in which the church of Rome does teach and assert it; and so teaching justification by faith, and the free grace of God in Jesus Christ, as to maintain the indispensable necessity of the virtues of a good life.

And thus I have done with the first reason, why

it is so fit and necessary to press frequently upon Christians the indispensable necessity of the virtues of a good life; viz. because men are and ever have been so very apt to deceive themselves in this matter, and so hardly brought to that wherein religion mainly consists, viz. the practice of real goodness. I shall be brief upon the

II. Second reason; namely, Because of the indispensable necessity of the thing to render us capable of the Divine favour and acceptance, and of the reward of eternal life. And this added to the former, makes the reason full and strong. For if men be so apt to deceive themselves in this matter, and to be deceived in it be a matter of such dangerous consequence, then it is highly necessary to inculcate this frequently upon Christians, that no man may be mistaken in a matter of so much danger, and upon which his eternal happiness depends. Now, if obedience to the laws of God, and the practice of virtue and good works, be necessary to our continuance in a state of grace and favour with God, and to our final justification by our absolution at the great day; if nothing but holiness and obedience can qualify us for the blessed sight of God, and the glorious reward of eternal happiness; then it is matter of infinite consequence to us, not to be mistaken in a matter of so great importance; but that we "work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and give all diligence to make our calling and election sure," by adding "to our faith and knowledge the virtues of a good life; that by patient continuance in well-doing, we seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, and eternal life;" and that we so demean ourselves "in all holy conversation and godliness," as that we may, with comfort

and confidence, " wait for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." That this is indispensably necessary to our happiness, I have in my former discourse shewn at large, from the great end and design of religion in general, and of the Christian religion in particular, from the whole design and doctrine of the gospel, from the constant tenor of the Bible, and from the nature and reason of the thing.

I know it hath been the great design of the devil and his instruments, in all ages, to undermine religion, by making an unhappy separation and divorce between godliness and morality, between faith and the virtues of a good life; and by this means, not only to weaken and abate, but even wholly to destroy, the force and efficacy of the Christian religion, and to leave men as much under the power of the devil and their lusts, as if there were no such thing as Christianity in the world. But let us not deceive ourselves; this was always religion, and the condition of our acceptance with God, to endeavour to be like God in purity and holiness, in justice and righteousness, in mercy and goodness, " to cease to do evil, and to learn to do well." And this you will find to be the constant doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, from the beginning of the Bible to the end. (Gen. iv. 7.) " If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (Psalm xv. 1, 2.) " Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell upon thy holy hill? he that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth from his heart." (Psal. l. 23.) " To him that ordereth his

conversation aright, will I shew the salvation of God." (Isa. i. 16—18.) " Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." (Isa. iii. 10, 11.) " Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him." (Micah vi. 8.) " He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

And our blessed Saviour, in his sermon upon the mount, tells us plainly what manner of persons we must be, if ever we hope to be happy, and to enter into the kingdom of God; and wherein his religion consists, in righteousness, and purity, and meekness, and patience, and peaceableness; and declares most expressly, that if we hope for happiness upon any other terms than the practice of these virtues, we build upon the sand. (Acts x. 34.) " Of a truth I perceive, (says St. Peter there,) that God is no respecter of persons; but, in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Gal. vi. 7, 8.) " Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." (Eph. v. 6.) " Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh

the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." (1 John iii. 7.) "Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." And here in the text, "This is a faithful saying," &c. "These things are good and profitable to men," acceptable to God, and honourable to religion, and the only way and means to eternal life, through the mercy and merits of Jesus Christ, our blessed Lord, and Saviour.

SERMON CCVIII.

OF THE NECESSITY OF GOOD WORKS.

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.—TIT. iii. 8.

I COME now to the second thing I proposed, which was, to answer an objection or two, to which the preaching of this kind of doctrine may seem liable.

First, That this is to advance and set up morality.

Secondly, That this seems to contradict St. Paul's doctrine of "justification by the free grace of God in Jesus Christ, and by faith without the works of the law." I shall endeavour to answer both these.

First, That this is to advance and set up morality. To which I answer two things:

I. That if by morality men mean counterfeit virtue, and the specious show of justice, and charity, and meekness, or any other virtue, without the truth and reality of them, without an inward principle of love to God and goodness, out of ostentation and vain-glory, or for some other bye and sinister end, such as probably were the virtues of many heathens, and it is to be feared of too many Christians; if this be that which the objectors mean by morality, then we do assure them, that we preach up no such morality, but those virtues only which are sin-

cere, and substantial, and real, the principle and root whereof is the love of God and goodness, and the end the honour and glory of God, and a necessary ingredient whereof is sincerity and truth. It is "righteousness and true holiness," the sincere love of God and our neighbour, real meekness, and patience, and humility, and sobriety, and chastity, and not the glittering show and appearance, the vain and affected ostentation, of any of these virtues, which we persuade and press men so earnestly to endeavour after.

Not that I believe that all virtues of the heathen were counterfeit and destitute of an inward principle of goodness; God forbid that we should pass so hard a judgment upon those excellent men, Socrates, and Epictetus, and Antoninus, and several others, who sincerely endeavoured to live up to the light and law of nature, and took so much pains to cultivate and raise their minds, to govern and subdue the irregularity of their sensual appetites and brutish passions, to purify and refine their manners, and to excel in all virtue and goodness. These were glorious lights in those dark times, and so much the better for being good under so many disadvantages, as the ignorance and prejudice of their education, the multitude of evil examples continually in their view, and the powerful temptation of the contrary customs and fashions of the generality of mankind.

Nor were they wholly destitute of an inward principle of goodness; for though they had not that powerful grace and assistance of God's Holy Spirit which is promised and afforded to all sincere Christians (as neither had the Jews, who were the peculiar people of God, and in covenant with him), yet it is very credible, that such persons were under a

special care and providence of God, and not wholly destitute of Divine assistance, no more than Job and his friends, mentioned in the Old Testament, and Cornelius in the New, who surely were very good men, and accepted of God, though they were gentiles, and "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise:" but yet not excluded from the blessing of the Messias, though they were ignorant of him, as many of the Jews likewise were, nor from the benefit of that great propitiation, which in the fulness of time he was to make for the sins of the whole world.

So that there is no need so uncharitably to conclude (as some of the ancients have done, not all, nor the most ancient of them neither), that there were no good men among the heathen, and that the brightest of their virtues were counterfeit, and only in show and appearance. For there might be several good men among the gentiles, in the same condition that Cornelius was before he became a Christian; of whom it is said, whilst he was yet a gentile, that "he was a devout man, and feared God, and that his prayer and his alms were accepted of God;" a certain sign that they were not counterfeit. And if he had died in that condition, before Christ had been revealed to him, I do not see what reasonable cause of doubt there can be concerning his salvation; and yet it is a most certain and inviolable truth, "that there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus; neither is there salvation in any other." And good men in all ages and nations from the beginning of the world, both before the law, and under the law, and without the law, such as "feared God, and wrought righteousness," were accepted of him

in that name, and by the meritorious sacrifice of that Lamb of God, which, in respect of the virtue and efficacy of it, is said to have been "slain from the foundation of the world."

II. But if by moral virtues be meant those which concern the manners of men, from whence they seem to have taken their name, and which are in truth the duties commanded and enjoined by the natural or moral law, and are comprehended under those two great commands (as our blessed Saviour calls them), the love of God, and our neighbour; I say, if this be the meaning of it, then we do advance this kind of morality, as that which is the primary and substantial part of all religion, and most strictly enjoined by the Christian. To which purpose our Saviour tells us, (Matt. v. 17.) that he was not "come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them." And, (ver. 19.) "Whosoever therefore shall break one of the least of these commandments, and teach men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven;" that is, under the dispensation of the gospel. So that this is a principal part of the Christian religion, to teach and practise the duties of the moral law. This the pharisees were defective in, placing their religion in external and little things, but neglecting the great duties of morality, "the weightier matters of the law, mercy, and judgment, and fidelity, and the love of God." And therefore he adds, (ver. 20.) "I say unto you, except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." It is not possible in more express and emphatical words to enjoin the obser-

vation of the duties of the moral law. And then for that great principle and rule of moral justice, "To do to all men, as we would have them to do to us;" our Saviour enjoins it as an essential part of religion, and the sum and substance of our whole duty to our neighbour, and of all the particular precepts contained in the law and the prophets. (Matt. vii. 12.) "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." And St. Paul most expressly declares, that he was so far from weakening or making void the obligation of the law by his doctrine of justification by faith, that he did thereby confirm and establish it: (Rom. iii. 31.) "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law."

So that moral duties and virtues are the same with Christian graces, and with that holiness and righteousness which the gospel requires, and differ only in name and notion. They are called virtues, with relation to the intrinsical nature and goodness of them; and graces, with respect to the principle from which they flow, being the fruits and effects of the gracious operation of the Spirit of God upon our minds. And it hath been a very ill service to religion, to decry morality as some have done, not considering that moral duties are of primary obligation, and bound upon us by the law of nature; and that Christianity hath reinforced and seconded the obligation of them by more powerful motives and encouragements. But I proceed to the

Second objection; viz. That this discourse seems to be contrary to St. Paul's doctrine of justification by the free grace of God in Jesus Christ, by faith, without the works of the law.

To which I answer, that St. Paul, when he does so vehemently and frequently assert justification by the free grace of God, and by faith, without the works of the law, does not thereby exclude the necessity of works of righteousness, and obedience to the moral precepts of the gospel, as the condition of our continuance in the favour of God, and of our final and perfect justification and absolution by the sentence of the great day; but, on the contrary, does every where declare the necessity of a holy and virtuous life to this purpose. And this is most plainly the tenor and current of his doctrine throughout all his epistles. But whenever he contends that "we are justified by faith without works," he denies one of these three things:

1. That the observation of the law of Moses is necessary to our justification and salvation. And this he does in opposition to those who troubled the Christian church, by teaching that it was still necessary to Christians to keep the law of Moses; and that unless they did so, they could not be saved; of which we have a full account given, Acts xv. And this for the most part is the meaning of that assertion, so frequent in his Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, that "we are not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Christ." And this is very evident from the tenor of his reasoning about this matter, in which he does so frequently urge this argument, and insist so strongly upon it; viz. that men were justified before the law of Moses was given, for which he instances in Abraham, and therefore the observance of that law cannot be necessary to a man's justification and salvation.

2. Sometimes he, in his discourse upon this argument, denies the merit of any works of obedience

and righteousness to gain the favour and acceptance of God; so that we cannot challenge any thing of God "as of debt, and as a ground of boasting," but we owe all to the free grace and mercy of God; and when we have done our best, have done but our duty. And this he likewise frequently insists upon in his Epistle to the Romans, in opposition to an arrogant opinion, common among the Jews, of the merit of good works, and that God was indebted to them for their obedience. In this sense, he says, (Rom. iv. 4.) "Now to him that worketh is the reward reckoned, not of grace but of debt;" that is, he that claims justification and the reward of eternal life, as due to him for his obedience, does not ascribe it to the free grace of God, but challengeth it as a debt due to him.

3. Sometimes he denies the necessity of any works of righteousness, antecedently to our first justification, and being received into a state of grace and favour with God; and asserts, on the contrary, that by the faith of Christ, and sincerely embracing the Christian religion, men are justified: and though they were never so great sinners before, all their past sins are forgiven, and God is perfectly reconciled to them. In which sense he says, (chap. iv. 5.) that "God justifies the ungodly" upon their believing. So that, whatever sins they were guilty of before, and though they never did any one good action in their lives, yet, if they sincerely embrace the Christian religion, and thereby engage themselves to reform their lives, and to obey the precepts of the gospel for the future, God will thereupon receive them into his favour, and pardon the sins of their former lives. And in this Epistle to Titus, (chap. iii. 5. 7. immediately before the text)

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and by the renewing of the Holy Ghost: that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life;" that is, though their former life had been very bad, (as he describes it before, ver. 3. "For we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice, and envy, and hatred of one another;") I say, notwithstanding this, though they had done no works of righteousness, but on the contrary, yet, upon their solemn profession of Christianity at their baptism, and declaration of their repentance, and engagements to live better, they were justified freely by God's grace, and saved by his mercy. But then he does not say, that, after this solemn profession of Christianity, works of righteousness were not necessary, to continue them in this state of grace and favour with God, but quite contrary; he plainly declares the necessity of them in the very next words; "This is a faithful saying," &c.

And the consideration of this will fully reconcile the seeming difference between St. Paul and St. James, in this matter of justification. St. Paul affirms, that a sinner is at first justified and received into the favour of God, by a sincere profession of the Christian faith, without any works of righteousness preceding. St. James affirms, that no man continues in a justified state, and in favour with God, whose faith doth not bring forth good works, and that it is not a true and lively faith which doth not approve and shew itself to be so, by the works of obedience and a good life. (James ii.14.) "What doth it profit a man, my brethren, if a man say that

he hath faith, and hath not works; can faith save him?" And, (ver. 17.) "Faith if it have not works is dead, being alone." And (ver. 20.) he repeats it again, "Know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead." And (ver. 22.) speaking of Abraham, "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" And, (ver. 26.) "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." The sum and result of all which is this: that though we be justified at first by faith without works preceding, yet faith without good works following it will not finally justify and save us; nay, indeed, that faith which does not bring forth the fruits of a good life, was never a true, and living, and perfect faith; but pretended, and dead, and imperfect, and therefore can justify no man; and he that hath only such a faith does but make an empty and ineffectual profession, but is really destitute of the true faith of the gospel.

And this is agreeable to that explication which was given by our first reformers here in England, of the nature of justifying faith. "That it is not a mere persuasion of the truths of natural and revealed religion, but such a belief as begets a submission to the will of God, and hath hope, love, and obedience to God's commandments joined to it. That this is the faith which in baptism is professed, from which Christians are called the faithful; and that, in those Scriptures where it is said we are justified by faith, we may not think that we be justified by faith, as it is a separate virtue from hope and charity, the fear of God and repentance; but by it is meant faith, neither only nor alone, but with the aforesaid virtues, containing an engagement of obedience to the whole doctrine and religion of Christ.

And that although all that are justified, must of necessity have charity as well as faith, yet neither faith nor charity are the worthiness and merit of our justification, but that is to be ascribed only to our Saviour Christ, who was offered upon the cross for our sins, and rose again for our justification;" as may be seen more at large in a treatise published at the beginning of our Reformation, upon this and some other points. And I do not see what can be said upon this point with more clearness and weight.

All the application I shall make of this discourse shall be briefly this; that if we be convinced of the necessity of the virtues of a good life to all that profess themselves Christians, we would seriously and in good earnest set about the practice of them; if "this be a faithful saying," then I am sure it greatly concerns us to be careful of our lives and actions, and that "our conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ;" because if this be true there is no possible way to reconcile a wicked life, no, nor a wilful neglect and violation of any of the duties and laws of Christianity, with the hopes of heaven and eternal life. In this the Scripture is positive and peremptory, that "every man that hath this hope in him, must purify himself even as he is pure;" that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord:" but "if we have our fruit unto holiness, our end shall be everlasting life."

And here I might particularly recommend to your careful practice, the great virtues of Christianity; those which St. Paul tells us are the proper and genuine "fruits of the Spirit of Christ, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance." But I have not time to insist particularly upon them. I shall content myself

briefly to mention those duties, which the apostle in this Epistle doth more especially press upon the several conditions and relations of men. Those who are teachers and instructors of others, that they would not only be careful to "preach sound doctrine," but "in all things to shew themselves patterns of good works." Those who are subject to others, and under their government, that they would pay all duty and obedience to their superiors, as children to their parents, servants to their masters; that they may "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things," as the apostle speaks, (chap. ii. ver. 10.) And so likewise, those who are subjects, that they live in all peaceable and humble obedience to princes and magistrates. This our apostle speaks of as a great duty of Christian religion, and reckons it among good works; (chap. iii. 1.) "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates, and to be ready to every good work."

And then those who are of an inferior condition, that they labour and be diligent in the work of an honest calling, for this is privately good and profitable unto men and to their families; and those who are above this necessity, and are in a better capacity, to maintain good works, properly so called, works of piety, and charity, and justice; that they be careful to promote and advance them, according to their power and opportunity, because these things are publicly good and beneficial to mankind. "And besides this, (as St. Peter exhorts, 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, &c.)—And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, god-

liness ; and to godliness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins;" that is, doth not consider that the design of Christianity is to renew and reform the hearts and lives of men. " Wherefore the rather, brethren (as he goes on), give diligence to make your calling and election sure : for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

I will conclude all with that excellent saying of St. Paul in this Epistle to Titus, which so fully declares to us the great design, and the proper efficacy of the Christian doctrine upon the minds and manners of men ; (chap ii. 11—13.) " For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world : looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

" To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all glory and honour now and for ever. Amen."

SERMON CCIX.

OF DOING ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.—1 Cor. x. 31.

These words are a general conclusion inferred from a particular case, which the apostle had been discoursing of before; and that we may the better understand the meaning of this general rule, it will not be amiss to look back a little upon the particular case the apostle was speaking of; and that was concerning "the partaking of things offered to idols," and that in two cases; either by partaking of the idol-feasts in their temples, after the sacrifices; or by partaking of things offered to idols, whether they were brought by Christians in the market, or set before them at a private entertainment, to which by some heathens they were invited.

The first he condemns as absolutely unlawful: the other not as unlawful in itself, but in some circumstances upon the account of scandal.

The first case he speaks of from ver. 14, to 23. "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, flee from idolatry. I speak to wise men: judge ye what I say." As if he had said, You may easily apprehend what it is I am going to caution you against. And first he tells them in general, that they who communicated in the worship of any deity, or in any kind of sacrifice offered to him, did, in so doing, own and acknowledge that for a deity. To this purpose he instanceth in communicating in the Christian sa-

crament, and in the Jewish sacrifices, (ver. 16—18.) "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: (that is, the Jews) are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" Thus it is in the Christian and the Jewish worship. And the case is the same, if any man partake of the idol-feasts in their temples. This he does not express, but takes it for granted they understood what this discourse aimed at.

And then he answers an argument, which it seems was made use of by some, particularly the gnostics, of whom the apostle speaks, (chap. viii.) and that was this. If an idol be nothing, and consequently things sacrificed to idols were not to be considered as sacrifices, then it was lawful to partake of the idol-feasts, which were celebrated in their temples. And that the apostle speaks of these, is plain from his discourse against the gnostics, who made use of this argument for the lawfulness of communicating at the idol-feasts, (chap. viii. 4.) "As concerning, therefore, the eating of things which are offered in sacrifice unto idols; we know that an idol is nothing in the world," &c. And (ver. 10.) "If any man see thee which hast knowledge (alluding to the very name of gnostics)—if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in an idol temple."

This then is that partaking of idol-feasts, which the apostle here speaks of, which they pretended to be lawful, because an idol is nothing. This, says the apostle, I know as well as you, that an idol is

no real deity, but for all that the devil is really worshipped and served by this means: (ver. 20.) "But I say that the things which the gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God; and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils! ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and the table of devils."

Having declared this way of partaking of things offered to idols to be unlawful in itself, and a virtual renouncing of Christianity; then he proceeds to the consideration of the other case, of eating of things offered to idols out of their temples, which might happen several ways. Sometimes, being sold by the priests, they were exposed to sale in the market. Sometimes the heathens carried some remainders of the sacrifices to their houses, and, inviting the Christians to a feast, might set these meats before them; what should Christians do in either of these cases?

First, He determines, in general, that out of the temples it was lawful to eat these things, because in so doing they communicated in no act of worship with the heathens; it is lawful, he says, in itself; but because it might be harmful to others, and give scandal, in such circumstances, it became unlawful by accident. (Ver. 23.) "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." Things which are lawful in themselves, may in some cases be very dangerous and destructive to others, and we should not only consider ourselves, but others also. "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's welfare." And then he comes to the particular cases. "Whatever is sold in the shambles, that

eat, asking no question for conscience' sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." We may take these things from God's hand, who is the true Lord of them and of all creatures. For this reason we may, without scrupulous inquiry, use those meats which are publicly exposed to sale.

And so likewise, in the other case, if we be invited to the table of a heathen, we may eat what is set before us, without inquiring whether it be part of an idol-sacrifice. But if any man tells us, that this meat was offered in sacrifice to idols, in that case we ought to abstain from eating of it, "for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience' sake;" that is, out of regard to the opinion of those who think these meats unlawful: "for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." Also, in another sense, God hath made such abundant provision for us, that we may abstain from this or that meat without any great inconvenience. "Conscience, I say, not thine own but another's." He had said before, we should "eat of what was set before us, asking no question for conscience' sake;" that is, not making it a matter of conscience to ourselves: now, he says, if we be told it was offered to an idol, we should "not eat for conscience' sake;" that is, not as making a matter of conscience of it to ourselves, but out of regard to the conscience of another, to whom it might be a scandal. "For why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? and if I with thanksgiving be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?" that is, why should another man's conscience be a prejudice to my liberty? If another makes conscience of it as unlawful, why should his conscience govern mine, and make me think so too; or why should I be

evil spoken of, for thinking it lawful to eat any thing set before me, for which I give thanks? This is a little obscure; but the plain meaning of the apostle's reasoning seems to be this:—though I have that regard to another man's weak conscience, as to abstain from eating what he thinks unlawful; yet am I not therefore bound to be of his opinion, and think it unlawful in itself; I will consider his weakness so far as to forbear that which I am persuaded is lawful to do, but yet I will still preserve the liberty of my own judgment; and as I am content to give no scandal to him, so I expect that he should not censure and condemn me for thinking that lawful, which he believes not to be so: and then, from all this discourse, the apostle establisheth this general rule in the text; "Wherefore, whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." To which is parallel that other text, (1 Pet. iv. 11.) "That God in all things may be glorified." So that this general rule lays a duty upon all Christians of designing the glory of God in all their actions; all the difficulty is, what is here meant by this, of doing all things "to the glory of God." The Jews have a common saying, which seems to be parallel with this phrase of the apostle, "That all things should be done in the name of God." And this they make so essential to every good action, that it was a received principle among them, that he who obeys any command of God, and not in his name, shall receive no reward. Now, that to do things "in the name of God," and to do them "to his glory," are but several phrases signifying the same thing, is evident from that precept of the apostle, (Col. iii. 17.) "And whatsoever ye do in word, or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord

Jesus Christ;" that is, to his glory. Now for our clear understanding of the sense of this phrase of glorifying God, or doing things to God's glory; we will consider the various use of it in Scripture, and so descend to the proper and particular sense of it here in the text.

The glory of God is nothing else but the honour which is given to him by his creatures; and consequently, the general notion of glorifying God, or doing any thing to his glory, is to design to honour God by such and such actions: and this phrase is in Scripture more especially applied to these following particulars:

I. We are said in Scripture to glorify God by a solemn acknowledgment of him and his perfections, of his goodness and mercy, of his power and wisdom, of his truth and faithfulness, of his sovereign dominion and authority over us. Hence it is that all solemn actions of religion are called the worship of God, which is given to him by his creatures, signified by some outward expression of reverence and respect. Thus we are said to worship God, when we fall down before him, and pray to him for mercy and blessings, or praise him for favours and benefits received from him, or perform any other solemn act of religion: (Psal. lxxxvi. 9.) "All nations whom thou hast made, shall come and worship before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name."

But, especially, the duty of praise and thanksgiving is most frequently in Scripture called glorifying of God, or giving glory to him. (Psal. lxxxvi. 12.) "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and will glorify thy name." (Matt. v. 16.) "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify

your Father which is in heaven;" that is, praise him upon that account. (Luke v. 25.) It is said of the man sick of the palsy, that when he was healed, "He departed to his own house glorifying God;" that is, praising God for his great mercy to him. And (Luke xvii. 18.) our Saviour, speaking of the ten lepers that were healed, says, that "but one of them returned to give glory to God;" that is, to return thanks to God for his recovery.

II. Men are said in Scripture to give glory to God by the acknowledgment of their sins, and repentance of them. (Josh. vii. 19.) "And Joshua said to Achan, My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to him." In like manner, the prophet Jeremiah, exhorting the people to repentance, useth this expression: (Jer. xiii. 16.) "Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains." And (Rev. xvi. 9.) it is said, that those upon whom great plagues fell, "repented not to give God glory." We glorify God by confession of our sins and repentance, because in so doing we acknowledge his authority, and the holiness of those righteous laws which we have broken.

III. We are said, likewise, in Scripture to glorify God by our holiness and obedience. Thus we are commanded to glorify God by the chastity of our bodies, and the purity of our minds: (1 Cor. vi. 20.) "Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are his." Thus our Saviour is said to have glorified God in the world, by his perfect obedience to his will: (John xvii. 4.) "Father, I have glorified thee upon earth." And thus he tells us we may glorify God, by the fruits of holiness and obedience in our lives: (John xv. 8.) "Herein is my Father

glorified, if ye bring forth much fruit." So likewise St. Paul prays for the Philippians, that they may be "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God."

IV. We are said likewise, in an especial manner, to glorify God by our sufferings for his cause and truth. (John xxi. 19.) Our Saviour foretelling St. Peter's martyrdom, expresseth it by this phrase of glorifying God by his death; "This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God."

V. And lastly, And because religion is the solemn honour, and public owning and acknowledgment of the Deity; hence it is, that in Scripture we are said to glorify God in a peculiar and eminent manner, when in all our actions we consult the honour and advantage of religion. Upon this account, St. Peter exhorts the ministers of the gospel so to preach to the people, and so to perform the public offices of religion, as may be for the honour of religion; and this he calls glorifying of God: (1 Pet. iv. 11.) "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified." And because the peace and unity of Christians is so very much for the honour and advantage of religion, therefore we are said, in an especial manner, to glorify God, by maintaining the peace and unity of the church: (Rom. xv. 5, 6.) "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." And here in the text, we are said to "do all things to the glory of God," when in all our actions we have a regard to the promoting and advancing of religion, and the

edification of Christians. For here, by eating and drinking "to the glory of God," the apostle plainly means, that when things offered to idols are set before us, we should refrain from them, when, by our eating, the interest of religion, and the edification of Christians, may receive any prejudice; that is, when our eating may be a scandal to others, that is, a stumbling-block, or an occasion of falling into sin. And that this is the apostle's meaning is evident from ver. 23. "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; (οὐ πάντα συμφέρει, all things profit not;) all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not;" that is, though I know it is a thing very lawful in itself, to eat things which have been offered to idols, if they be bought in the market, or accidentally set before me at a feast; yet, in some circumstances, it may not be for the advantage of religion, and be so far from edifying, that it may be an occasion of sin to them. For instance, I am invited to a feast, where things offered to idols are set before me, and one says, This was offered in sacrifice unto idols; a sufficient intimation to me that he thinks it unlawful; and therefore I will forbear, because of the inconvenience to religion, and the manifold scandal that might follow upon it, by hindering others from embracing religion; or by tempting weak Christians, either to the doing of a thing against their conscience, or to apostatize from religion. In this case, he that abstains from these meats, and contents himself with others, eats "to the glory of God."

And, that this is the true notion of scandal or offence, not barely to grieve others, or do things displeasing to them, but to do such things as are really hurtful to others, and may be a prejudice or

hinderance to their salvation, and an occasion of their falling into sin: I say, that this is the true and proper notion of scandal is evident from what follows immediately after the text; "Give none offence, to the Jews, nor to the gentiles, nor to the church of God; as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." "Give no offence to the Jews, nor to the gentiles, nor to the church of God:" the apostle intimates, that such an action as this we are speaking of, might be an occasion of sin to all these, and a hinderance of their salvation: it might hinder the Jew from turning Christian, and harden him in his infidelity; for he might say, See how well you Christians worship one God, when you can partake of things offered to idols: it might confirm the heathen in his superstition, and keep him from embracing Christianity; for he might say, surely, Why should the Christians persuade me to forsake the worship of idols, when they themselves will knowingly eat things offered to them? It might tempt the weak Christians either to sin against their consciences by following my example, or to apostatize from Christianity upon this offence taken against it; therefore, says the apostle, "do all things to the glory of God;" that is, for the honour and advantage of the Christian religion, and the furtherance of men's salvation: for so, says he, I do, in these and all other actions of my life; I study the advantage of all men, in all things, not regarding mine own convenience in comparison of the eternal salvation of others.

And thus I have as briefly and clearly as I could explained this phrase to you, of doing things "to the glory of God."

The result of all is, that we glorify God by doing our duty, by all actions of worship and obedience to God, and by our repentance in case of sin and disobedience, by doing and by suffering the will of God, more especially by using our Christian liberty, as to things lawful in themselves, so as may make most for the honour and advantage of religion, for the unity and edification of the church, and the salvation of the souls of men, which is the proper notion here in the text of eating and drinking, and doing whatever we do, "to the glory of God."

From all this discourse it will be evident, that three things must concur, that our actions may be said to be done "to the glory of God."

1. Our actions must be materially good; we must do what God commands, and abstain from doing what he hath forbidden. Sin is in its nature a dishonour to God, a contradiction to his nature, and a contempt of his authority and laws; so that we cannot glorify God by transgressing our duty.

2. Our actions must not only be good, but they must be done with regard to God, and out of conscience to our duty to him, and in hopes of the reward which he hath promised, and not for any low, and mean, and temporal end. The best action in itself may be spoiled, and all the virtue of it blasted, by being done for a wrong end. If we serve God to please men, and be charitable out of vainglory "to be seen of men;" if we profess godliness for gain, and are religious only to serve our temporal interest, though the actions we do be never so good, yet all the virtue and reward of them is lost, by the mean end and design which we aim at in the doing of them; because all this while we have no love or regard for God, and the authority of his

laws; we make nó conscience of our duty to him, we are not moved by the rewards of another world, which may lawfully work upon us, and prevail with us, but we are swayed by little temporal advantages, which if we could obtain as well by doing the contrary, we would as soon, nay, perhaps, much sooner, do it.

And this is so essentially necessary, that no action, though never so good, that is not done with regard to God, and upon some of the proper motives and considerations of religion, such as are the authority of God, conscience of our duty to him, love of him, faith in his promises, fear of his displeasure; I say, no action that is not done upon all, or some of these motives, can be said to be done "to the glory of God." And this is the meaning of that saying among the Jews which I mentioned before, "That he who obeys any command of God, but not in his name, shall receive no reward." Moral actions receive their denomination of good or evil, as well from the end, as from the matter of them; and as the best end cannot sanctify an action bad in itself, so a bad end and design is enough to spoil the best action we can do; and as it is great impiety to do a wicked thing, though for a religious end, so it is great hypocrisy to be religious for mean and temporal ends.

3. That all our actions may be done "to the glory of God," we must not only take care that they be lawful in themselves, but that they be not spoiled and vitiated by any bad circumstance; for circumstances alter moral actions, and may render that which is lawful in itself, unlawful in some cases: so that if we would "do all things to the glory of God," we must in some cases refrain from doing that which

is lawful in itself. As, when such an action that I am about to do, may through the prejudice or mistake of men probably redound to the dishonour and disadvantage of religion, by causing factions and divisions, by hindering some from embracing the true religion, or making others apostatize from it, or by being any other way an occasion to men of falling into sin, or any impediment to their salvation; in these and the like cases, we are bound to have that consideration of religion, that regard to the peace and unity of the church, that tenderness and charity for the souls of men, as to deny ourselves the use of things otherwise lawful; and if we do not do it, we offend against a great rule both of piety and charity.

I shall only farther at present endeavour to give a brief resolution to two questions, much debated upon occasion of this rule of the apostle, of doing "all things to the glory of God."

First, How far we are bound actually to intend and design the glory of God in every particular action of our lives. To this I answer,

1. That it is morally impossible that a man should do every particular action with actual and explicit thoughts and intentions of glorifying God thereby, and therefore there can be no obligation to any such thing.

2. It is not necessary, no more than for a man that takes a journey, every step of his way actually to think of his journey's end, and at the place whither he intends to go; a constant resolution to go to such a place, and a due care not to go out of the way; and in case of any doubt, to inform ourselves as well as we can of the right way; and to keep in it, is as much consideration of the end of a man's journey,

as is needful to bring him thither, and more than this would be troublesome and to no purpose; the case is the very same in the course of a man's life. From whence it follows, in the

3. Third place, That a habitual and settled intention of mind, to glorify God in the course of our lives, is sufficient; because this will serve all good purposes, as well as an actual intention upon every particular occasion. He that doeth things with regard to God, and out of conscience of his duty to him, and upon the proper motives and considerations of religion, in obedience and love to God, in hopes of his reward, and out of fear of his displeasure, glorifies God in his actions. And if this principle be but rooted and settled in his mind, it is sufficient to govern his life, and is virtually, and to all purposes, as true and constant an intention of glorifying God, as if we did actually and explicitly propound this end to ourselves in every particular action of our lives.

Secondly, Whether a man be bound to prefer the glory of God before his own eternal happiness, as Moses and St. Paul seem to have done; the one in being content to have his name blotted out of the book of life, the other to be anathema from Christ, for the salvation of Israel? To this I answer,

If we could admit the supposition, that the glory of God and a man's eternal happiness might come in competition, there could be no obligation upon a man to choose eternal misery upon any consideration whatsoever. The preference of one thing before another, supposeth them both to be objects of our choice; but the greatest evil known and apprehended to be so, cannot be the object of a reasonable choice; neither the greatest moral nor natural

evil of sin, or misery. Sin is not to be chosen in any case, no, not for the glory of God. The apostle makes the supposition, and answers it; that if the truth and glory of God could be promoted by his lie, yet we are "not to do evil that good may come," (Rom. iii. 7, 8.)

Nor is the greatest natural evil the object of our choice. God himself hath planted a principle in our nature to the contrary, to seek our own happiness, and to avoid utter ruin and destruction; and then surely much more that which is much worse, as eternal misery is, whatever some learned men, in despite of nature and common sense, have asserted to the contrary, that it is better and more desirable to be extremely and eternally miserable, than not to be; for what is there desirable in being, when it serves to no other purpose but to be the foundation of endless and intolerable misery? And if this be a principle of our nature, can any man imagine that God should frame us so, as to make the first and fundamental principle of it directly opposite to our duty?

As to the instance of Moses, it does not reach this case; because the phrase of "blotting out of the book of life," does in all probability signify no more than a temporal death. As to that of St. Paul, it is by no means to be taken in a strict sense, but as a vehement and hyperbolical expression of his mighty affection to his brethren according to the flesh, "For whom (says he) I could wish to be an anathema from Christ." Besides the reason of the thing, the form of the expression shews the meaning of it, "I could wish;" that is, I would be content to do or suffer almost any thing for their salvation; insomuch, that I could wish, if it were fit, and law-

ful, and reasonable, to make such a wish, to be accursed from Christ for their sakes. It is plainly a suspended form of speech, which declares nothing absolutely. But,

2. It is a vain and senseless supposition, that the glory of God and our eternal happiness can stand in competition. By seeking the glory of God, we naturally and directly promote our own happiness; the glory of God and our happiness are inseparably linked together; we cannot glorify God by sin; and so gracious hath God been to us, that he hath made those things to be our duty which naturally tend to our felicity; and we cannot glorify God more than by doing our duty, nor can we promote our own happiness more effectually than by the same way. From whence it plainly follows, that the glory of God and our happiness cannot reasonably be supposed to cross and contradict one another; and therefore the question is frivolous, which supposeth they may come in competition. (1 Cor. xv. 58.) The apostle exhorts Christians to be "steadfast, and unmoveable, and abundant in the work of the Lord, knowing that their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." And (Tit. i. 1, 2.) the apostle calls himself "a servant of Jesus Christ, in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie hath promised." To serve God in hope of eternal life, is to glorify God; and therefore the glory of God and our eternal happiness are never to be opposed.

I shall briefly draw two or three inferences from this discourse, and so conclude.

I. See here the great goodness of God to mankind, who is pleased to esteem whatever is for the good of men, to be for the glory of God; and what-

ever tends to the eternal salvation of ourselves or others, to be a glorifying of himself.

II. We learn hence, likewise, the excellency of the Christian religion, which requires, not only a conscientious care of ourselves to do nothing but what is lawful, but likewise a charitable regard to others in the use of our liberty; in the doing or not doing of those things which we may lawfully do; after the securing of our own happiness by doing our duty, we are to consult the edification and salvation of others, in the charitable use of our liberty in those things which God hath left indifferent.

III. Here is a great argument to us to be very careful of our duty, and to abound in the fruits of holiness, because hereby we glorify God. "Herein is my Father glorified, (says our Saviour) if ye bring forth much fruit;" and the apostle tells us, that "the fruits of righteousness are to the praise and glory of God." We having all from God, our very being, our souls and bodies, and the powers and faculties of both, therefore we should give him the glory of his own gifts; our souls and bodies were not only made by him at first, but are likewise redeemed by him, and bought with a price, and therefore, as the apostle argues, "we should glorify him in our bodies, and in our souls, which are his."

IV. And lastly, We should in all our actions have a particular regard to the honour and advantage of religion, the edification of our brethren, and the peace and unity of the church; because, in these things, we do in a peculiar manner glorify God. In vain do men pretend to seek the glory of God by faction and division, which do in their own nature so immediately tend to the dishonour and damage

of religion. Next to the wicked lives of men, nothing is so great a disparagement and weakening to religion, as the divisions of Christians; and therefore, instead of employing our zeal about differences, we should be zealous for peace and unity, "that with one mind, and one mouth, we may glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

SERMON CCX.

DOING GOOD, A SECURITY AGAINST INJURIES FROM MEN.

And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?—1 PET. iii. 13.

THE apostle, in this and the former chapter, earnestly presseth Christians to a holy and unblameable conversation, that the heathen might have no occasion, from the ill lives of Christians, to reproach Christianity; particularly, he cautions them against that abuse of Christian liberty, which it seems too many were guilty of, casting off obedience to their superiors under that pretence; telling them, that nothing could be a greater scandal to their religion, nor raise a more just prejudice in the minds of men against it: and therefore he strictly chargeth them with the duty of obedience in their several relations, as of subjects to their governors, of servants to their masters, of wives to their husbands; and, in short, to practise all those virtues, both among themselves and towards others, which are apt to reconcile and gain the affections of men to them; to be charitable and compassionate, courteous and peaceable, one towards another, and towards all men: not only to abstain from injury and provocation, but from revenge by word or deed; and instead thereof to bless and do good, and by all possible means to preserve and pursue peace. (Ver. 8, 9.) "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of

another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but, contrariwise, blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing."

And to encourage them to the practice of these virtues, he tells them, that they could by no other means more effectually consult the safety and comfort of their lives: (ver. 10.) "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile; let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it."

And this was the way to gain the favour of God, and engage his providence for our protection: (ver. 12.) "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil."

And that this would also be the best way to reconcile men to us, and to gain their good-will, and to prevent injuries and affronts from them: (ver. 13.) "And who is he that will harm you," &c.

In these words we have, first, a qualification supposed, "If ye be followers of that which is good."

Secondly, The benefit and advantage we may reasonably expect from it: viz. security from the ill usage and injuries of men. "Who is he that will harm you?"

First, The qualification supposed is, that we be "followers of that which is good." But what is that? The apostle takes it for granted, that every body knows it, and he had given instances of it before. He does not go about to define or explain it, but appeals to every man's mind and conscience, to tell him what it is. It is not any thing that is dis-

puted and controverted, which some men call good, and others evil; but that which all are agreed in, and which is universally approved and commended by heathens as well as Christians, that which is substantially good, and that which is unquestionably so. It is not zeal for lesser things, about the ritual and ceremonial part of religion, and a great strictness about the external parts of it, and much nicety and scrupulousness about things of no moment, as the pharisees' tithing of mint, &c. about meats and drinks, and the observation of days, and the like; but a pursuit of the weightier things of the law, a care of the great duties of religion, mercy, and justice, and fidelity; those things wherein the kingdom of God consists, righteousness and peace: such as these the apostle had instanced in, as substantial and unquestionable parts of goodness, things which admit of no dispute, but do approve themselves to the reason and conscience of all mankind; and the practice of these he calls following of that which is good.*

"Be ye followers of that which is good;" the word is μιμηταὶ, "if ye imitate the good you see in others;" in one copy the word is ζηλωταὶ, "if ye be zealous of that which is good;" and this is not amiss. Zeal about lesser and disputable things is very unsuitable and misbecoming; but we cannot be too earnest and zealous in the pursuit of things which are substantially and unquestionably good; it is good, and will become us to be zealously affected about such things. Some things will not bear much zeal, and the more earnest we are about them, the less we recommend ourselves to the approbation of sober

* See more of this, Sermon CCI. vol. viii. p. 465.

and considerate men. Great zeal about little and doubtful things, is an argument of a weak mind, infatuated by superstition, or overheated by enthusiasm; but nothing more becomes a wise man, than the serious and earnest pursuit of those things which are agreed on all hands to be good, and have an universal approbation among all parties and professions of men, how wide soever their differences may be in other matters. This, for the qualification supposed, "if ye be followers of that which is good." I proceed to the

Second thing in the text, The benefit and advantage which may reasonably be expected from it; and that is, security from the ill usage and injuries of men: "Who is he that will harm you," &c. The apostle doth not absolutely say, none will do it; but he speaks of it as a thing so very unreasonable, and upon all accounts so unlikely and improbable, that we may reasonably presume that it will not ordinarily and often happen. Not but that good men are liable to be affronted and persecuted, and no man's virtues, how bright and unblemished soever, will at all times, and in all cases, exempt him from all manner of injury and ill treatment; but the following of that which is good (as I have explained it), doth in its own nature tend to secure us from the malice and mischief of men, and very frequently does it, and, all things considered, is a much more effectual means to this end, than any other course we can take; and this the apostle means when he says, "Who is he that will harm you?"

And this will appear, whether we consider the nature of virtue and goodness; or the nature of man, even when it is very much depraved and corrupted; or the providence of God.

I. If we consider the nature of virtue and goodness, which is apt to gain upon the affections of men, and secretly to win their love and esteem. True goodness is inwardly esteemed by bad men, and many times had in very great esteem and admiration, even by those who are very far from the practice of it; it carries an awe and majesty with it; so that bad men are very often withheld and restrained from harming the good, by that secret and inward reverence which they bear to goodness.

There are several virtues which are apt in their own nature to prevent injuries and affronts from others. Humility takes away all occasion of insolence from the proud and haughty, it baffles pride, and puts it out of countenance. Meekness pacifies wrath, and blunts the edge of injury and violence. Suffering good for evil is apt to allay and extinguish enmity, to subdue the roughest dispositions, and to conquer even malice itself. And there are other virtues which are apt in their own nature to oblige men, and gain their good-will, and make them our friends, and to tie their affections strongly to us; as courtesy and charity, kindness and compassion, and a readiness to do all good offices to all men; and the friendship and good-will of others, is a powerful defence against injuries. Every man will cry shame of those who shall fall foul upon him that hurts nobody. He that obliged many, shall have many to take his part when he is assaulted, to rise up in his defence and rescue, and to interpose between him and danger. "For a good man (says the apostle) some would even dare to die."

Besides, it is very considerable, that none of these virtues expose men to any danger and trouble from human laws. When Christianity was persecuted,

because it differed from, and opposed the received religion and superstition of the world, it was commonly acknowledged by the heathen (as Tertullian tells us), that the Christians were very good men in all other things, saving that they were Christians. When the laws were most severe against Christians for their meetings, which they called seditious, and for their refusal to comply with the received superstition of the world, which they called contempt of the gods, yet there were all this while no laws made against modesty, and humility, and meekness, and kindness, and charity, and peaceableness, and forgiveness of injuries. These virtues are in their nature of so unalterable goodness, that they could not possibly be made matter of accusation; no government ever had the face to make laws against them. And this the apostle takes notice of as a singular commendation, and great testimony to the immutable goodness of these things, that, in the experience of all ages and nations, there was never any such inconvenience found in any of them, as to give occasion to a law against them: (Gal. v. 22, 23.) "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, fidelity, meekness, temperance. Against such things there is no law." So that goodness from its own nature hath this security, that it brings men under the danger of no law.

II. If we consider the nature of man, even when it is very much depraved and corrupted. There is something that is apt to restrain bad men from injuring those that are remarkably good; a reverence for goodness and the inward convictions of their own mind, that those whom they are going about to injure, are better and more righteous than themselves; the fear of God, and of bringing down his

vengeance upon their heads, by their ill treatment of his friends and followers; and many times the fear of men, who, though they be not good themselves, yet have an esteem for those that are so, and cannot endure to see them wronged and oppressed, especially if they have been obliged by them, and have found the real effects of their goodness in good offices done by them to themselves.

Besides that, bad men are seldom bad for nought, without any cause given, without any manner of temptation and provocation to be so. Who will hurt a harmless man, and injure the innocent? For what cause, or for what end, should he do it? He must love mischief for itself, that will do it to those who never offered him any occasion and provocation.

III. If we consider the providence of God, which is particularly concerned for the protection of innocency and goodness. "For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance will behold the upright." This the apostle takes notice of, in the verse before the text, as the great security of good men against violence and injury: "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer." So that if bad men were never so ill disposed toward the good, and bent to do them all the injury and mischief they could devise, the providence of God hath a thousand ways to prevent it; and if he pleases to interpose between them and danger, who can harm them if they would? He can snare the wicked in the works of their own hands, and make the mischief which they devised against good men, to return upon their own heads; he can weaken their hands and infatuate their counsels, so that they shall not be able to

bring their wicked enterprises to pass; he can change their hearts, and turn the fierceness and rage of men against us, into a fit of love and kindness, as he did the heart of Esau towards his brother Jacob; and their bitterest enmity against truth and goodness, into a mighty zeal for it, as he did in St. Paul, who, when he came to Damascus, fell a preaching up that way, which he came thither on purpose to persecute. And this God hath promised to do for good men who are careful to please him. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he will make his enemies to be at peace with him."

So that, considering the nature of goodness, and the nature of man, and the providence of God, who is like to harm us, "if we be followers of that which is good?" None can reasonably do it, and he must be a very bad man that can find in his heart to do it, when there is no cause, no temptation, or provocation to it; and the providence of God, who hath the hearts of men in his hands, and can sway and incline them as he pleaseth, is particularly concerned to preserve good men from harm and mischief.

And yet we are not to understand this saying of the apostle, as declaring to us the constant and certain event of things, without any exception to the contrary. For good men to appearance, nay those that are really so, and the very best of men, are sometimes exposed to great injuries and sufferings; of which I shall give you an account in these following particulars:

I. Some that seem to be good, are not sincerely so; and when they, by the just judgment of God, are punished for their hypocrisy, in the opinion of many, goodness seems to suffer. Some, under a

great profession and colour of religion, have done very bad things, and when they justly suffer for great crimes, they call punishment persecution, and the party and church which they are of call them saints and martyrs.

II. Some that are really good, are very imperfectly so, have many flaws and defects, which do very much blemish and obscure their goodness; they are "followers of that which is good," but they have an equal zeal for things which have no goodness in them, or so little that it is not worth all that stir and bustle which they make about them; and will contend as earnestly for a doubtful, and it may be for a false opinion, as for the articles of the creed, and for "the faith which was once delivered to the saints;" and will oppose a little ceremony with as much heat as the greatest immorality. In these cases, it is not men's goodness which raiseth enmity against them, but their imprudent zeal, and other infirmities which attend it: but, however, bad men are glad to lay hold of these occasions and pretences of enmity, which their indiscretion offers. Good men may be, and frequently are, mistaken in their opinions and apprehensions of things; but it is a great mistake to have an equal zeal for little and doubtful things, as for the great and indispensable duties of the Christian life, and yet many times so as to neglect those to a great degree; and men must blame themselves for the inconveniences that happen to them for their own indiscretion; for neither will the nature of the thing bear them out alike, nor will the providence of God be equally concerned to protect men in the following of that which they, through a gross mistake and a heady conceit of their own knowledge in religion, think

to be good, as in the following of that which is really and unquestionably good.

III. The enmity of some men against goodness is so violent and implacable, that no innocency, no excellency of goodness, how great soever, can restrain their malice towards good men, or hinder the effects of it, when it comes in their way, and they have power to do them mischief. Against these the providence of God is our best safeguard, and it is wisdom, as much as is possible, to keep out of their way, and to pray with St. Paul, that we may be "delivered from wicked and unreasonable men." Men of so absurd a malice against goodness, that it is not to be prevented by any innocency or prudence; and so implacable, that there is no way to gain and reconcile them, nor, perhaps, is it much desirable: their good word would be no credit to us, and their friendship would be pernicious, when it cannot be had upon other terms than of conniving at their faults, and being concerned in their quarrels, and at last quarrelling and breaking with them, unless we will "run with them to the same excess of riot." The friendship of such men is more terrible than their enmity, and their malice much less to be dreaded than their kindness.

IV. The last and chief exception is that of the cross, when the sufferings and persecutions of good men are necessary for the great ends of God's glory, for the advancement of religion, and the example and salvation of others. And with this exception, all the declarations of Scripture concerning the temporal prosperity and safety of good men, and all the promises of the New Testament, are to be understood. And this exception our Saviour himself expressly makes: (Mark x. 29, 30.) "Verily, I

say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive a hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life;" that is, so far as a state of persecution would admit, all these losses should be recompensed to them in this present time; as they were to the apostles in a remarkable manner: when they who had but little to part with for the gospel, had the estates of Christians laid at their feet and committed to their disposal, for the noblest purposes of charity, and common support of Christians, which was as much to them as if they had been masters of the greatest estates; and whatever was wanting to any of them in the accomplishment of this promise, was abundantly made up to them in the unspeakable and eternal happiness of the world to come. And this exception the apostle St. Peter is careful to mention expressly, immediately after the text; for after he had said, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" he immediately adds, "But, and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts;" that is, in this case, fear God more than men; "and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you;" that is, if ye be questioned for being Christians, be ready to own your profession, and to give a reason of it: so that the apostle supposeth, that, notwithstanding what he had said, that ordinarily it is not in the nature of men to persecute men for true good-

ness, yet they must not expect to be exempted from persecution, which was necessary for the establishment of the Christian religion.

In these cases, God permits the devil to instigate and exasperate evil men against those that are good, to act beyond their usual temper. Thus God, when he designed an illustrious example of patience for all ages of the world, he lets loose the devil, not only to stir up his instruments the Chaldeans and Sabeans against Job, but to afflict him immediately himself with bodily pains and diseases. In these and the like cases, the best men are exposed to the greatest sufferings. Thus God permitted Socrates, that great light among the gentiles, and the glory of philosophy, to be cruelly treated and put to death for an example of virtue, and a testimony against their impious and abominable idolatry. And thus, likewise, when it was necessary for the common salvation of men, and to give the world an example beyond all exception of the greatest innocency, enduring the greatest indignities and sufferings with the greatest patience, that one should suffer for all mankind, he permitted the best man that ever was, God and goodness incarnate, "by wicked hands to be crucified and slain;" and afterwards, when it was necessary for the propagation and establishment of Christianity in the world, that the truth of it should be sealed by the death of so many martyrs, God was pleased to suffer the rage of bad men to break out into all manner of violence and cruelty.

But yet, notwithstanding these exceptions, those who make it their business to do good, and to excel in those virtues which are apt to win and oblige mankind, may, in ordinary cases and times, expect great safety and protection against the injuries of

the world, from an exemplary piety, and innocency, and goodness; for these sayings in the New Testament, that "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God," and that "whoever will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution," are not equally to be extended to all places and times; but more peculiarly to be understood of the first times of Christianity, when the providence of God thought fit to establish the Christian religion upon the innocent lives and patient sufferings of the first professors of it.

The result from all this discourse is, that we should not be weary of well-doing; but mind and follow the things which are substantially and unquestionably good; not doubting but, besides the infinite reward of it in the other world, it will ordinarily turn to our great security and advantage in this life, and save us harmless from a great many mischiefs and inconveniences which others are exposed to. If we endeavour to excel in those Christian virtues which the apostle mentions before the text, and which he means by our being "followers of that which is good;" we shall undoubtedly find the comfort of it, in those temporal benefits that will redound to us: for the Scripture hath not said in vain, "Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Glory, and honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good." That "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that work peace;" that, "by well-doing, we shall put to silence the ignorance of foolish men;" that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost;" and that "he

that in these things serveth Christ, is accepted of God and approved of men."

But if we mistake religion, and place it in those things wherein it doth not really consist, in airy notions and doubtful opinions, in superstitious conceits and practices, and in a fiery and furious zeal for things of no weight and substance, of no real virtue and goodness; if we be defective in the great virtues of meekness and humility, of peaceableness and charity, of kindness and courtesy, of forbearance and forgiveness, of "rendering good for evil, and overcoming evil with good," qualities which will universally endear us and recommend us to the favour and protection of God, and to the esteem and good-will of men; and if, instead of these, we abound in malice and envy, be proud and conceited, censorious and uncharitable, contentious and unpeaceable, rude and uncivil, impatient and implacable; we must not think it strange if we be ill treated in this world, not for our goodness, but for our want of it; and we have no reason to wonder, if, at every turn, we meet with the inconveniences of our own heat and indiscretion, of our peevish and morose temper, of our factious and turbulent disposition. For this is an eternal rule of truth, "As we sow, so shall we reap;" every man shall be "filled with his own ways, and eat the fruit of his own doings."

SERMON CCXI.

OF DILIGENCE IN OUR GENERAL AND PARTICULAR CALLING.

[Preached at Whitehall, 1685.]

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might: for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. —Eccl. ix. 10.

These words of the royal preacher are a general exhortation to diligence and industry, in that work which is most proper for us to do in this world. And I shall consider in them these two things:

First, The matter of this advice and exhortation; and that is, that we would use great diligence about those things which are the proper work and employment of this life. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do;" that is, the work which is before thee, which is most proper for thee to propose to thyself, as the great end and design of thy life, the province and charge which is appointed thee. So that these words, in the full compass and extent of them, may very well comprehend every reasonable purpose and undertaking, whatever is incumbent upon us as a duty, and is matter of reasonable choice. "Do it with thy might;" that is, set about it with great care, use all possible diligence and industry for the effecting and accomplishing of it.

Secondly, Here is the argument whereby the wise

preacher doth enforce this counsel and exhortation; because this life is the proper season of activity and industry, of designing and doing those things which are in order to a future happiness; and when this life is at an end, there will be no farther opportunity of working, there will nothing then remain, but to reap the fruit, and to receive the just recompence of what we have done in this life; "For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."—"In the grave," this the LXX. render by the word ἅδης, by which the Greeks used to express the state of the dead, the condition of separate souls of good or bad men after they are departed this life, and entered into another world. In which state, Solomon does not mean that departed souls have no knowledge and sense of any thing, but that then there will be no place for any counsel and design, for any activity and industry, in order to our happiness: what we do to this purpose, we must do whilst we are in this world; it will be too late afterwards to think of altering or bettering our condition.

These are the two parts of the text, and they shall be the two heads of my following discourse; and God grant that what shall be said upon them, may be effectual to persuade every one of us seriously to mind our great interest and concernment, and to apply ourselves with all our might to that which is our proper work and business in this world.

First, We will consider the matter of this counsel and exhortation; and that is, that we would use great diligence and industry about that which is our proper work and business in this life; and this may very probably comprehend in it these two things:

I. Diligence in our great work and business, that

which equally concerns every man; I mean the business of religion, in order to the eternal happiness and salvation of our souls.

II. Diligence in our particular calling and charge, whatever it be.

I. Diligence in our great and general work, that which equally concerns every man, the business of religion, in order to the eternal happiness and salvation of our souls; and this consists in these two things:

1. In a sincere care and endeavour of universal obedience to God, by the conformity of our lives and actions to his laws.

2. In case of sin and miscarriage, in a sincere repentance for our sins, and a timely care to be reconciled to God.

1. In a sincere care and endeavour of universal obedience to God, by the conformity of our lives and actions to his will and law. And this is a great work, and requires our greatest care and diligence to rectify our minds, to restrain our evil inclinations, to subdue and mortify our lusts, to correct the irregularity of our passions, to moderate and govern our appetites and affections, and to keep them within due and reasonable bounds, "to take heed to our ways, that we offend not with our tongue," nor transgress our duty by word or deed; to serve God with true devotion of mind, both in public and private; to attend upon the duties of his worship, and to perform all acts of piety and religion, with care and constancy, in the sincerity and uprightness of our hearts; to be meek and humble, peaceable and patient, cheerful and contented with our condition; to be ready not only to forgive injuries, but to requite them with kindness and good turns; to do all offices

of humanity and charity to all men, according to our ability and opportunity; to instruct the ignorant, and to reduce those that are in error to the knowledge of the truth, by wise counsel and good example; to endeavour "to turn men from the evil of their ways," and "to save their souls from death;" to be ready to supply men's outward wants and necessities, to comfort them in their sorrows, and to relieve them in their affliction and distress.

And these works of compassion and charity are, perhaps, more particularly intended here in the text; for so the Chaldee paraphrase interprets these words of Solomon, as a precept of charity, rendering them thus, "Do all thou canst, according to thy utmost ability in alms and charity:" for nothing but this will turn to our account in another world; no other way of laying out our estates will be of any advantage to us in the future state. And though I do not think Solomon did here intend to exclude any part of religious practice, yet he might very well have a more especial eye and regard to this, as one of the principal instances and best evidences of a true and sincere piety, according to that of St. James, (chap. i. ver. 27.) "Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." To be sure, our Saviour lays mighty weight upon it, by making it the great article by which men shall be tried at the judgment of the great day. And, indeed, no religion is to be valued, that wants humanity and compassion; for so far as it departs from this, it departs from the true nature of God and religion.

So that it is a vast work which lies upon our hands, and which every one of us, from the highest to the lowest, are engaged in; this business of reli-

gion, this care of our whole man, and of our whole duty, of the inward frame and disposition of our minds, and of all our words and actions, "to keep our hearts with all diligence," and carefully to observe and govern all the inclinations and motions of our souls, and "to order our whole conversation aright;" in a word, to do God all the service, and men all the good, that possibly we can, while we are in this world. This is the first.

2. And, because "in many things we offend all, and there is no man that sinneth not," another part of our work and care is, in case of transgression and miscarriage in any part of our duty, to exercise repentance for it, that so we may be reconciled to God, and at peace with him.

And this is absolutely necessary, because our life and happiness depend upon it, and "except we repent we must perish," and be miserable for ever. It cannot be denied but that this work of repentance is very harsh and unpleasant, like the taking of physic, and searching into a wound; but because it tends to our health and safety, and is the necessary way and means to a better condition, this severity must be submitted to, if we desire to be cured, and have a mind to be well; and the sooner we make use of this remedy the better, we shall find so much the less difficulty and pain in the cure.

And there is great reason why we should frequently exercise and renew our repentance, because our failings are frequent, and in one kind or other we offend and provoke God every day: especially when we are coming to the holy sacrament, in which we solemnly renew our covenant with God, and promise him better obedience for the future; we should examine our lives more strictly, and call

our sins more particularly to remembrance, and exercise a most solemn and deep repentance for them; this is the way to keep our accounts in a good measure even. And this surely is great wisdom, to provide that we may have no long account to make up, no great scores to wipe off, when we come to be overtaken by sickness, and to lie upon our death-bed; that innumerable transgressions unrepented of may not then compass us about, and stare us in the face, and fill our souls with fear and confusion, with horror and amazement, in a dying hour; that an insupportable load of guilt may not then lie upon our minds, and oppress our consciences, when we are least able to bear it, and most unfit to deal with it, when we may not have time to call our sins particularly to remembrance, and to exercise a particular repentance for them, and yet perhaps a general repentance may not be sufficient, and available with God, for the pardon and forgiveness of them.

Therefore we should exercise ourselves much in this work of repentance in the days of our health, when we are fittest for it, and when it will be most acceptable to God, and when the sincerity of it will be most evident and comfortable to us, when we may know it to be true by the real and certain effects of it, in the change and amendment of our lives. Whereas a death-bed repentance is infinitely hazardous, because we may not perhaps have time and opportunity for the exercise of it; or if we should have that, yet hardly can we have opportunity for the trial of it, whether it be sincere or not, and consequently must needs die very uncomfortably, and in great doubt and anxiety of mind, what will be our fate and doom in another world.

So that it is a great work which lies upon our hands, and equally concerns every one of us. The business of religion, which consists in the strict care of our duty to God and man, and in the frequent exercise of repentance for the sins and miscarriages of our lives; and we may consequently judge, how great a care and diligence a work of so much difficulty, and of so great moment and importance, does require and call for at our hands. But besides this, we must in the

II. Second place, likewise, be diligent in our particular calling and charge, in that province and station which God hath appointed us, whatever it be; whether it consists in the labour of our hands, or in the improvement of our minds, in order to the gaining of knowledge for our own pleasure and satisfaction, and for the use and benefit of others; whether it lie in the skill of government, and the administration of public justice; or in the management of a great estate, of an honourable rank and quality above others, to the best advantage, for the honour of God, and the benefit and advantage of men, so as, by the influence of our power and estate, and by the authority of our example, to contribute all we can to the welfare and happiness of others.

For it is a great mistake to think that any man is without a calling, and that God does not expect that every one of us should employ himself in doing good in one kind or other. Some persons indeed, by the privilege of their birth and quality, are above a common trade and profession, but they are not hereby either exempted or excused from all business, and allowed to live unprofitably to others, because they are so plentifully provided for themselves: nay, on the contrary, they have so much the greater

obligation, having the liberty and leisure to attend the good of others; the higher our character and station is, we have the better opportunities of being publicly useful and beneficial; and the heavier will our account be, if we neglect these opportunities. Those who are in a low and private condition, can only shine to a few, but they that are advanced a great height above others, may, like the heavenly bodies, dispense a general light and influence, and scatter happiness and blessings among all that are below them.

And as they are capable of doing more good than others, so with more ease and effect; that which persons of an inferior rank can hardly bring others to, by all the importunity of counsel and persuasion, as, namely, to the practice of any virtue, and the quitting and abandoning of any vice, a prince and a great man that is good himself may easily gain them to, without ever speaking a word to them, by the silent authority and powerful allurement of his example. So that though every man have not a particular profession, yet the highest among men have some employment allotted to them by God, suitable to their condition, a province which he expects they should administer and adorn with great care.

The great business of the lower part of mankind is to provide for themselves the necessaries of life, and it is well if they can do it with all their care and diligence; but those who are of a higher rank, their proper business and employment is to dispense good to others; which surely is a much happier condition and employment, according to that admirable saying of our Saviour, mentioned by St. Paul, "It is a more blessed thing to give, than to

receive." Those of meaner condition can only be men to one another, and it were well if they would be so; but he that is highly raised and advanced above others, hath the happy opportunity in his hands, if he have but the heart to make use of it, to be a kind of god to men.

Let no man then, of what birth, or rank, or quality soever, think it beneath him to serve God, and to be useful to the benefit and advantage of men; let us remember the Son of God, a person of the highest quality and extraction that ever was, who spent himself wholly in this blessed work of doing good, toiled and laboured in it as if it had been for his life, submitted to all the circumstances of meanness, to all the degrees of contempt, to all kind of hardship and sufferings, for the benefit and salvation of men, sweat drops of blood, and at last poured it all forth in full streams, to save us from eternal misery and ruin; and is any of us better than "the Son of God, the heir of all things, and the elder brother of us all?" Shall any of us, after this, think ourselves too good to be employed in that work which God himself disdained not to do, when he appeared in the likeness and nature of man?

If we would esteem things rightly, and according to reason, the true privilege and advantage of greatness is, to be able to do more good than others; and in this the majesty and felicity of God himself doth chiefly consist, in his ready and forward inclination, and in his infinite power and ability, to do good. The creation of the world was a great and glorious design, but this God only calls his work; but to preserve and support the creatures which he hath made, to bless them and to do them good, to go-

vern them by wise laws, and to conduct them to that happiness which he designed for them, this is his rest, his perpetual sabbath, his great delight and satisfaction to all eternity; to do good is our duty and our business, but it is likewise the greatest pleasure and recreation, that which refresheth the heart of God and man.

I have insisted the longer upon this, that those who are thought to be above any calling, and to have no obligation upon them, but to please themselves, may be made sensible, that, according to their ability and opportunity, they have a great work upon their hands, and more business to do than other men; which, if they would but seriously mind, they would not only please God, but, I dare say, satisfy and please themselves much better than they do in any other course. I know it is a duty particularly incumbent upon the lower part of mankind, to be diligent in their particular calling, that so they may provide for themselves and their families; but this is not so proper for this place, and if it were, the necessity of human life will probably prompt and urge men more powerfully to this, than any argument and persuasion that I can use. I proceed therefore, in the

Second place, To offer some considerations to excite our care and diligence in this great work, which God hath given us to do in this world, I mean chiefly the business of religion, in order to the eternal happiness and salvation of our souls. And to this purpose, I shall offer five or six arguments, reserving the great motive and consideration in the text to the last, because "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

I. Let us consider the nature of our work, which is such, as may both excite and encourage our diligence and care about it. It is indeed a service, but such as is our perfect freedom; it is the service of God, whom to serve is the greatest honour that man or any other creature is capable of; it is obedience, but even obedience, considering our ignorance and frailty, is much wiser and safer for us, than a total exemption from all law and rule; for the laws which God hath given us, are not imposed upon us merely for his will and pleasure, but chiefly for our benefit and advantage. So that to obey and please God, is in truth nothing else but to do those things which are really best for ourselves.

Besides, that this work of religion will abundantly recompense all the labour and pains it can cost, if we consider the fruit and end of it, which is "the salvation of our souls;" so St. Paul assures us, (Rom. vi. 22.) that if we have "our fruit unto holiness," our end shall be everlasting life. Nay, this work doth not want its present encouragement and reward, if we consider the peace and pleasure which attends it; "Great peace (saith David) have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." Religion doth not design to rob men of the true delights of life, of any lawful pleasure and enjoyment; it only appoints them their due place, and season, and measure, without which they cannot be truly tasteful and pleasant: if we make pleasure and recreation our business, it will become a burden, and leave a sting behind it; but if we make it our great business to be good, and to do good, we shall then take true pleasure in our recreations and refreshments, we shall "eat our bread with joy, and drink our wine with a merry heart," as Solomon express-

eth it a little before the text. Religion doth not ordinarily debar men of any contentment which they can wisely and safely take, in any of the enjoyments of this life, but directs us to do those things which will yield the truest and most refined pleasure, and so governs us in the use and enjoyment of worldly comforts, that there shall be no bitterness in them, or after them: and in truth, after all our search and inquiry after pleasure and happiness, we shall find that there is no solid and lasting pleasure, but in living righteously and religiously: and the pleasure of this is so great, that a heathen philosopher, speaking of a virtuous life, according to the true precepts of philosophy, breaks out in this rapture and transport concerning the wonderful pleasure of it, *Vel unus dies vere et ex præceptis tuis actus peccandi immortalitati est anteferendus;* "Even one day truly spent according to thy precepts is to be valued above an immortality of sinning." There is no life so pleasant as that of the pious and good man, who being contented with himself, every thing about him contributes to his cheerfulness, *Gratior it dies, et soles melius nitent;* "The day passeth more pleasantly, and the sun shines brighter to him;" and every object which he beholds is more delightful, because the man is at peace and ease within himself.

II. Let us consider how great our work is, and then we shall easily be convinced what care it requires, what diligence it calls for from us. Very few persons, I doubt, are sufficiently sensible how much thought and consideration, how much care and vigilancy, how firm a resolution and earnest attention of mind, is necessary to the business of religion, to the due cultivating and improving of our minds, to

the mortifying and subduing of our lusts, to the mastering and governing of our passions, to the reforming of our tempers, to the correcting of all the irregularities of our appetites and affections, and to the reducing of our crooked wills, which have been long obstinately bent the wrong way, to the straightness of that rule which God hath given us to walk by.

Few, I fear, consider how much pains is necessary to the storing of our minds with good principles, and to the fixing and riveting in our souls all the proper motives and considerations to engage us to virtue, that in all the occasions of our lives they may have their due force and influence upon us. Few of us take pains to understand the just bounds and limits of our duty, and so to attend thereto, as to be always upon our guard against the infinite temptations of human life, and the many malicious enemies of our souls, that we may not be circumvented by the wiles of the devil, nor caught in those snares which he lays before us in our ways, that we be not wrought upon by the insinuations, nor overreached by the deceitfulness of sin.

How few consider what care and watchfulness of ourselves, what constancy and fervency of prayer to God, is necessary to the due discharge of every part of our duty; or to the right exercise of every grace and virtue! Besides an earnest imploring of the Divine assistance, there is required likewise a particular care and application of mind, that we may fail in no point; and that, as St. James expresseth it, "We may be entire, wanting nothing;" that our faith and our hope, our devotion and our charity, our humility and our patience, and every other grace, may be exercised in the best manner, and have its proper work.

III. Consider what incredible pains men will take, what diligence they will use, for bad purposes, and for ends infinitely less considerable; *Ut jugulent homines, surgunt de nocte latrones, ut teipsum serves, non expergiscere?* "Thieves will rise and travel by night to rob and kill, and shall we use no care, no vigilance, to save ourselves?" What drudges and slaves are many men to their sensual pleasures and lusts? How hot and fierce upon revenge? And what hazards will they run to satisfy this unreasonable and devilish passion; and thereby make way for a speedy and bitter repentance, which always treads upon the heels of revenge? For no sooner hath any man executed his rage upon another, but his conscience presently turns it upon himself.

How industrious do we see men at their recreations and sports, taking really more pains for the sake of pleasure, than the poor man does that works for his living?

What a violent thirst, and insatiable covetousness, possesseth some men after learning and knowledge! How will they toil and watch, wear out their eyes, and waste their spirits, and pursue their studies, not only with the neglect of fitting diversion, but even of the necessary support and reparation of nature, by meat and sleep? nay, many times, to increase their learning, they weaken their understandings, and for the gaining of more knowledge, do disable that power and faculty which should make use of it when they have it.

How will men attend for several hours to a lewd and extravagant play, and sit not only with patience, but with delight, to hear things spoken, which are neither fit to be spoken nor heard?

And, above all, how eager and earnest, how busy

and industrious, are a great part of mankind, in the pursuit of their ambitious and covetous designs; how sorely will they labour and travail? how hardly will they be contented to fare, and how meanly will they live themselves, to make they know not whom rich? even any body that happens to come in their way, when they make their last wills.

And are men at all this pains for compassing of their low and mean, of their vile and wicked designs, to do themselves no good; nay, for the most part, to hurt and destroy themselves? and are the present pleasures and satisfaction of our minds, and eternal life and happiness in another world, things of no value and esteem with us? Is salvation itself so slight and inconsiderable a thing, that it deserves none of this care and diligence to be used for the obtaining of it?

IV. Consider that when we come to die, nothing will yield more true and solid consolation to us, than the remembrance of an useful and well-spent life, a life of great labour and diligence, of great zeal and faithfulness in the service of God; and, on the contrary, with what grief and regret shall we look back upon all those precious hours which we have so fondly misplaced in sin and vanity! How shall we then wish that we could recal them, and live them over again, that we might spend them better! all that time which now lies upon our hands, and we know not how to bestow it and pass it away, will then most assuredly lie heavy upon our consciences. What anguish and confusion have I seen in the looks and speeches of a dying man, caused only by the grievous remembrance of an unprofitable and ill-spent life! So foolish are many men, as never seriously to think for what end they came

into the world, till they are just ready to go out of it.

V. Consider that the degrees of our happiness in another world, will certainly bear a proportion to the degrees of our diligence and industry in serving God, and doing good. And it is an argument of a mean spirit, not to aspire after the best and happiest condition, which is to be attained by us. To be contented barely to live, when by our pains and industry we may become considerable, and raise ourselves above the common level of men, is a sign of a poor and degenerate mind; so it is in the business of religion; to be contented with any low degrees of virtue and goodness, and consequently of glory and happiness, when, by a great diligence and industry in "serving our generation according to the will of God," we may be of the number of those, "whose reward shall be great in heaven," and have a place there, among those righteous persons, who "shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

Besides that, it may prove a thing of a dangerous consequence to us, to deal thus strictly with God, and to drive so near and hard a bargain with him; we may easily miss of happiness, and come short of heaven, if we only design just to get thither; we may be mistaken in the degree of holiness and virtue, which is necessary to recommend us to the Divine favour and acceptance, and to make us capable of the glorious reward of eternal life: for "unto whomsoever much is given, (saith our Saviour) of him much shall be required;" to him that hath only one talent committed to him, it may be sufficient to have gained one; but he that hath many talents entrusted to him, may gain one,

and yet be a wicked and slothful servant; proportionably to our advantages and opportunities, our duty increaseth upon our hands, and better and greater things may justly be expected from us. The consideration whereof should make us unwearied in our endeavours of doing good, "and steadfast and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

VI. And lastly, Let us consider the argument here in the text, "There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither we are going." *Longe quiescendi tempora fata dabunt*, we shall then rest from our labours, and our works will follow us. This life is the time of our activity and working, the next is the season of retribution and recompence; we shall then have nothing to do, but either to reap and enjoy the comfort of well-doing, or to repent the folly of an ill-spent life, and the irreparable mischief which thereby we have brought upon ourselves; "there is no work, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest;" intimating, that our life is a continual journey towards the grave, shorter or longer as God pleaseth; and many times when we think ourselves far from it, we may be just upon it, and ready to stumble into it. So that our time of working may be very short, to be sure it is very uncertain.

And it is very well worth our consideration, that as "there is no work nor wisdom in the grave," so there is very little to be exercised when we come to draw near to it, whether it be by sickness or old age: "Sufficient (surely) for that day will be the evil thereof." We had need then to have nothing else to do, but to be old and weak, to be sick and

die; we shall find that to be burden and trouble enough.

"Let us, therefore, work the work of him that sent us into the world while it is day; for the night cometh," saith our Saviour (by which may probably be meant the time of sickness or old age), "the night cometh, when no man can work;" so that what we do, we must do quickly, mind the work which is before us, and ply it with all our might, as if it were the last opportunity we should ever have; and so it may prove, for aught we know, for it is ten to one but that some here present, and God knows which of us it may be, may now have the last opportunity in our hands, and that but a slippery hold of it, and may never have this counsel given us again, nor, perhaps, be long in a capacity to make use of it; for when death hath once overtaken us, it will fix us in an unchangeable state, "as the tree falls, so it shall lie."

This is the time of our work and preparation for another world, and what we do towards it in this life, will avail us in the other; but if this opportunity be neglected, there is nothing to be done by us afterwards, but to inherit the fruit of our own folly and neglect; to sit down in everlasting sorrow, and to be immutably fixed in that miserable state, which whilst we were in this world we could never be persuaded to take any tolerable care to avoid.

And if we can do nothing for ourselves to help and relieve us in that state, much less can we think it can be done for us by others, by the consigning of masses and prayers, of merits and indulgences, to our use and benefit in another world. No, so soon as ever we are passed into the other state, we shall enter upon a condition of happiness or misery,

that is never to be altered. So that this life is the proper season for wisdom to shew itself, and to exercise our best industry for the attaining of happiness; it will be too late afterwards to think of altering or bettering our condition, for death will conclude and determine our state one way or other, and what we are when we leave the world, good or bad, fitted for happiness or misery, we shall remain and continue so for ever.

Therefore it infinitely concerns all of us, to exercise our best wisdom in this present life, and what we have to do for our souls, and for all eternity, to do it with our might: to contrive and use the best means to be happy, while the opportunity of doing it is yet in our hands; we may easily let it slip, but no care, no wisdom, no diligence, no repentance, can retrieve it; when it is once lost, it is lost for ever.

Hear then the conclusion of the whole matter; would we enjoy ourselves and the peace of our minds while we live? would we have good hopes and comfort in our death, and after death would we be happy for ever? Let us lay the foundation of all this, in the activity and industry of a religious and holy life; a life of unspotted purity and temperance in the use of sensual pleasures, of sincere piety and devotion towards God, of strict justice and integrity, and of great goodness and charity, towards men.

And let us consider that many of us are a great way already on our journey towards the grave, that our day is declining apace, and the shadows of the evening begin to be stretched out; therefore, that little of our life which is yet behind us should be precious to us, *ut esse solis gratius lumen solet, jam*

jam cadentis, we should improve that which yet remains, as it were for our lives, always remembering that our only opportunity of working, of designing, and doing great and happy things for ourselves, is on this side the grave, and that this opportunity will expire and die with us; "for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave," whither we are going.

"Now God of his infinite mercy grant, that we may all of us know, in this our day, the things which belong to our present peace, and future happiness, before they be hid from our eyes, for his mercy's sake in Jesus Christ; to whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, now and for evermore."

SERMON CCXII.

OF THE BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING, MORE THAN THAT OF RECEIVING.

And to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. —ACTS XX. 35.

The whole verse runs thus:

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak; and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

THE words which I have read to you, have this particular advantage to recommend them to our more attentive consideration, that they are a remarkable saying of our Lord himself, not recorded by any of the evangelists among his other sayings and discourses, but remembered by the apostles, and by some of them delivered to St. Paul, and by him preserved to us in his farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus. In which, after he had given them some needful advice, and commended them to the grace of God, he appeals to them concerning the integrity of his conversation among them; that he was so far from seeking his own advantage, and from coveting any thing that was theirs, that he had not only supported himself, but also relieved others by the labour of his own hands; giving them herein a great example of charity, which it seems he was wont to enforce upon them by an excellent

saying of our Lord, " It is more blessed to give than to receive."

And it is really a particular endearment of this saying to us, that, being omitted by the evangelists, and in danger of being lost and forgotten, it was so happily retrieved by St. Paul, and recorded by St. Luke. The common sayings of ordinary persons perish without regard, and are spilt like water upon the ground, which nobody goes about to gather up; but the little and short sayings of wise and excellent men are of great value, like the dust of gold, or the least sparks of diamonds. And such is this saying of our Lord, which is not only valuable out of respect to its author, but for the sake of that admirable sense which is contained in it.

Some interpreters have needlessly troubled themselves to find these words, or something equivalent to them, in the gospel. That the sense of them may be inferred from several passages in the gospels, none will deny; but that they are either expressly to be found there, or that there is any saying that sounds to the same sense, I think nobody can shew. Besides that St. Paul cites a particular sentence or saying of our Lord, that was ῥητῶς, and in those very words spoken by him.

And there is no reason to imagine, that the gospels are a perfect and exact account of all the sayings and actions of our Lord, though St. Luke calls his gospel, " a treatise of all things that Jesus did and spake;" that is, of the principal actions of his life, and the substance of his discourses, at least so much of them as is needful for us to know: for St. Luke leaves out several things related by the other evangelists. And St. John expressly tells us, that Jesus did innumerable things not recorded in the

history of his life: and there is no doubt but the disciples of our Lord remembered many particular sayings of his, not set down in the gospels, which upon occasion they did relate and communicate to others, as they did this to St. Paul.

The words themselves are the proposition I shall speak to, "It is a more blessed thing to give than to receive." This I know seems a paradox to most men, who know no happiness but in hoarding up what they have, and in receiving and heaping up more; but as strange as this saying may appear, the sense of it is owned and assented to by those great oracles of reason, the wisest and most considerate heathens; τῆς ἀρετῆς μᾶλλον τὸ εὖ ποιεῖν ἢ τὸ εὖ πάσχειν, "It is a more virtuous thing to do, than to receive good," says Aristotle; which according to his opinion was to say, it is a greater happiness, because he placed happiness in the practice and exercise of virtue. To the same purpose is that saying of Plutarch, εὖ ποιεῖν ἡδιόν ἐστιν ἢ πάσχειν; "There is more pleasure in doing a kindness than in taking one." And that of Seneca, *Malim non recipere beneficia, quam non dare;* "Of the two, I had rather not receive benefits, than not bestow them." And that the heathen have spoken things to the same sense with this saying of our Saviour's, is so far from being any prejudice to this saying of our Saviour, that it is a great commendation of it, as being an argument that our Saviour hath herein said nothing but what is very agreeable to the best notions of our minds, and to the highest reason and wisdom of mankind. In the handling of this proposition, I shall do these two things:

First, Endeavour to convince men of the truth and reasonableness of it.

Secondly, To persuade men to act suitably to it.

First, To convince men of the truth and reasonableness of this principle, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." And this will fully appear by considering these three things:

I. That it is an argument of a more happy spirit and temper.

II. Of a more happy state and condition, And,

III. That it shall have the happiness of a greater reward.

I. To be governed by this principle, is an argument of a more happy spirit and temper. To do good, to be useful and beneficial to others, to be of a kind and obliging disposition, of a tender and compassionate spirit, sensible of the straits and miseries of others, so as to be ready to ease and relieve them (for to this kind of goodness and charity the apostle applies this saying of our Saviour, as appears by the context), this certainly is the happiest spirit and temper in the world, and is an argument of a noble, and generous, and large heart, that is not contracted within itself, and confined to little and narrow designs, and takes care of nobody but itself, envying that others should share with it, and partake of its happiness; but is free and open, ready to do good, and willing to communicate, and thinks its own happiness increased by making others happy.

It is the property of narrow and envious spirits to think their own happiness the greater, because they have it alone to themselves; but the noblest and most heavenly dispositions desire that others should share with them in it. Of all beings, God is the farthest removed from envy and ill-will, and the nearer any creature approacheth to him, the farther it is from this hellish disposition. For it is the temper of the devil to grudge happiness to

others; he envied that man should be in paradise, and was restless till he had got him out.

Some perfections are of a more solitary nature and disposition, and shine brightest when they are attained to but by few, as knowledge and power: but the nature of goodness is to diffuse and communicate itself, and the more it is communicated the more glorious it is. And therefore knowledge and power may be in a nature most contrary to God's; the devil hath these perfections in a high degree.

To receive good from others is no certain argument of virtue or merit, for the unworthy and unthankful often receive benefits: but to be good and do good is the excellency of virtue, because it is to resemble God in that which is the most amiable and glorious of all his other perfections. And therefore when Moses desires "to see God's glory," (Exod. xxxiii. 19.) he tells him, that "he will cause all his goodness to pass before him." Without goodness the power and wisdom of God would be terrible, and raise great dread and superstition in the minds of men. Without goodness power would be tyranny and oppression, and wisdom would degenerate into craft and mischievous contrivance. So that a being endowed with all power and wisdom, and yet wanting goodness, would be a dreadful and omnipotent mischief. We are apt to dread power, and to admire knowledge, and to suspect great wisdom and prudence; but we can heartily love and reverence nothing but true goodness. It is not the infinite power and knowledge of God considered abstractedly, and in themselves, but these in conjunction with his great goodness, that make him at once the most awful and amiable being in the world; which is the reason why our Saviour, (Matt.

v. 48.) speaks of the mercy, and goodness, and patience of God, as the top and sum of the Divine perfections, " Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." How is that? In being " good to the evil and unthankful, as God is, who makes his sun to rise, and his rain to fall, not only on the just but unjust." And therefore St. Luke renders it, " Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father which is in heaven is merciful." To be good and merciful as God is, is to be perfect as he is; because it is to imitate him in that which is his chief perfection.

Gratitude is one of the noblest virtues, and our goodness to men is gratitude in us to God. It is an acknowledgment of the blessings we have received from God; the best use we can make of them, and the best requital we can make to him for all his benefits. For we can give him nothing again, because he stands in need of nothing. But a truly grateful person, who hath a kindness done to him by one that is out of all capacity and reach of requital, will inquire whether there be any of his family and relations, to whom he may shew kindness for his sake. Yea, benefits have often been requited by thankful persons, upon those who did but resemble their benefactors, though they were no ways related to them. Though we can do nothing to God, yet we may do it to men, who are " made after the image of God." We may shew kindness to his relations, and to those of his household and family, to his creatures, to his servants, to his friends, and to his children here in the earth.

Besides that our goodness to others like ourselves, is an argument of great consideration and prudence; it is a sign that we know ourselves, and consider what we are, and what we may be: it shews

that we have a due sense of the indigence and infirmity of human nature, and of the change and vicissitude of human affairs; it is a just sense and acknowledgment of our state, that we are insufficient for our own happiness, and good-will, and friendship of other men; that we all either do or may stand in need of others, one time or other: for he who is now in the greatest plenty and abundance of all things, and thinks his mountain so strong that he can never be moved, may, by a sudden revolution of fortune, by a thousand accidents, be thrown down from his height of prosperity into the depth of misery and necessity.

And as it is an argument of consideration, so of great prudence. He that is good to others, apt to commiserate their sad case, and to relieve them in their straits, takes the wisest and surest way that can be, to incline and engage others to be good to him, when it shall fall to his lot to stand in need of their kindness and pity. Upon this account our Saviour commends the prudence of the unjust steward, who laid in for the kindness of others, against himself should have occasion for it.

And though it should happen otherwise, and that we should have an uninterrupted tenor of prosperity (which few or none have), or that coming to stand in need of others, our kindness should meet with no equal returns, yet it would not be quite lost; for, as Seneca truly says, *delectat etiam sterilis beneficii conscientia*, though our charity should fall upon stony and barren ground, and we should find no fruit of it from those whom we have obliged, yet there is a pleasure in being conscious to ourselves that we have done well, what was worthy and generous, and what became wise and con-

siderate men to do, whatever the event and success be; for, setting aside all selfish respects, purely out of humanity, and charity, and a generous compassion, we should be ready as we have opportunity to do good to all that stand in need of our kindness and help.

So that a disposition to do good is the best and happiest temper of mind, because it is the nearest resemblance of the Divine nature, which is perfectly happy: it is a grateful acknowledgment of our obligations to God, and all that we can render to him for his benefits; it is an argument of great wisdom and consideration; it gives ease and satisfaction to our minds, and the reflection upon any good that we have done, is certainly the greatest contentment and pleasure in the world, and a felicity much beyond that of the greatest fortune of this world: whereas the spirit, contrary to this, is always uneasy to itself; the envious and malicious, the hard-hearted and ill-natured man carries his own torment and hell about him, his mind is full of tumultuous agitations and unquiet thoughts; but were our nature rectified and brought back to its primitive frame and temper, we should take no such pleasure in any thing, as in acts of kindness and compassion, which are so suitable and agreeable to our nature, that they are peculiarly called humanity, as if without this temper we were not truly men, but something else disguised under a human shape.

II. To give, is an argument of a more happy state and condition, than to receive. To receive from others is an argument of indigency, and plainly shews that we are in want and necessity; either that we stand in need of something, or that we think we do; and either of these conditions is far from perfect hap-

piness; but to give, is an argument of fulness and sufficiency, that we have more than is necessary for ourselves, and something to spare.

To receive kindness from others, supposeth we stand in need of it; and to stand in need of it, is to be in a state of being obliged and indebted. Obligation is a dear thing, and a real debt which lies heavy and uneasy upon a grateful mind: so much obligation as any man hath to another, so much he hath lost of his own liberty and freedom; for it gives him that hath obliged us a superiority and advantage over us: and what Solomon says of the borrower, that he is a servant to the lender, is in proportion true in this case, that the receiver is a servant to the giver.

But to be able to benefit others is a condition of freedom and superiority, and is so far from impairing our liberty, that it shews our power; and the happiness which we confer upon others by doing them good, is not only a contentment to ourselves, but we do in some sort enjoy the happiness we give, in being conscious to ourselves that we are the authors of it. And could we but once come to this excellent temper, to delight in the good that others enjoy, as if it were our own (and it is our own, if we be the instruments of it, and take pleasure in it); I say, could we but once come to this temper, we need not envy the wealth and splendour of the most prosperous upon earth, for upon these terms the happiness of the whole world would in some sort be ours, and we should have a share in the pleasure and satisfaction of all that good which happens to any man any way, especially by our means.

To depend upon another, and to receive from him, and to be beholden to him, is the necessary

imperfection of creatures; but to confer benefits upon others is to resemble God, and to approach towards divinity. Aristotle could say, that by narrowness and selfishness, by envy and ill-will, men degenerate into beasts, and become wolves and tigers to one another; but by goodness and kindness, by mutual compassion and helpfulness, men become gods to one another. To be a benefactor, is to be as like God as it is possible for men to be; and the more any one partakes of this Divine quality and disposition, the liker and the nearer he is to God, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works.

The blessed angels, who behold the face of God continually, are, as it were, perfectly transformed into the image of the Divine goodness, and therefore the work which, with so much cheerfulness and vigour, they employ themselves in, is to be ministering spirits for the good of the elect, to bring men to goodness, and to encourage, and assist, and comfort them in well-doing. And our blessed Lord, when he was upon earth, did in nothing shew himself more like the Son of God, than in going about doing good: and the wonderful works which he did gave testimony of his divinity, not so much as they were acts of power as of goodness, and wrought for the benefit and advantage of men; and the true advantage of greatness, and wealth, and power, does not consist in this, that it sets men above others, but that it puts them in a capacity of doing more good than others. Men are apt to call them their betters, who are higher and richer than themselves; but in a true and just esteem of things, they only are our betters who do more good than we. From the meanest creature

below us up to God himself, they are the best, and happiest, and most perfect beings, who are most useful and beneficial to others, who have the most power and the strongest inclinations to do good.

III. To give, that is, to be beneficial and to do good to others, hath the happiness of a great reward. There is no grace or virtue whatsoever, which hath in Scripture the encouragement of more and greater promises than this, of happiness in general; of temporal happiness in this life, of happiness at death, and of everlasting happiness in the world to come.

1. For promises of happiness in general. "He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor, his righteousness endures for ever;" that is, shall never be forgotten, shall not pass unrewarded. (Prov. xiv. 21.) "He that giveth to the poor, happy is he." (Matt. v. 7.) "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Luke vi. 38.) "Give, and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom; for with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again;" that is, according to our goodness and compassion towards others, we must expect to find the charity of men, and the compassions of God towards us. Job speaks as if some eminent and peculiar blessing did attend and follow acts of charity: (Job xxv. 19.) "The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me."

2. Promises of temporal happiness in this life: (Psal. xxxvii. 3.) "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." (Prov. xxviii. 27.) "He that giveth to the poor shall not lack." Nay, God hath pro-

mised to have a particular respect to such as do good, in every condition, and all kinds of troubles that befal them. (Psal. xli. 1—3.) "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness."

3. Of happiness in death. "The righteous (saith Solomon, Prov. xiv. 32.) hath hope in his death." By the righteous, in Scripture, is frequently meant the merciful and good man. And so it is to be understood, as appears from the context; "He that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker; but he that honoureth him, hath mercy upon the poor. The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death." If God designs to send calamities upon the earth, upon the place where the good man lives, which it would grieve him to see, or which he might be involved in, so as either to make his life uncomfortable, or to cut him off by a violent death; God considers the merciful man, and removes him out of the way into a better and safer place: (Isaiah lvii. 1.) "The merciful man is taken away from the evil to come."

4. The promises of eternal life and happiness in the world to come. (Luke xiv. 13, 14.) "But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind: and thou shalt be blessed. For they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." And, (chap. xvi. 9.) "And I say unto you, (saith our Lord,) Make to yourselves friends of the

mammon of unrighteousness," that is, to do good with what you have, "that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." (1 Tim. vi. 17—19.) "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust to uncertain riches; but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." And the more to fix upon our minds the necessity of doing good, especially in ways of mercy and charity, our Lord represents this as the great matter of inquiry at the great day of judgment, how they have behaved themselves in this kind, what good they have done, or omitted and neglected to do; especially to those who were in misery and want; and as if the sentence of eternal happiness or misery would accordingly pass upon them. And this, methinks, should make a mighty impression upon us, to think that when we shall appear before the great Judge of the world, we are to expect mercy from him, according to the measure that we have shewed it to others.

And now, if men be thoroughly convinced of the happiness of this temper, methinks it should be no difficult matter to persuade them to it. If we believe this saying of our Lord, that "It is more blessed to give than to receive;" let us do accordingly.

I know that to carnal and earthly-minded men, this must needs seem a new and wrong way to happiness. For if we may judge of men's persuasions by their practice (which seems to be a reasonable and good sure way of judging), I am afraid it

will appear, that few believe this to be the way to happiness. If we mind the course of the world, and the actions of men, it is but too evident that most men place their greatest felicity in receiving and getting the good things of this world; almost all seek their own things, and but few the good of others. Many say, Who will shew us? who will do us any good? but few ask that question, "What good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" And when our Lord tells men that they must "give to the poor," if they would have "treasure in heaven;" that they must be charitable, if they would be happy; that, "It is a more blessed thing to give than to receive;" these are sad and melancholy sayings to those who have great possessions; and most men are ready with the young man in the gospel to part with our Lord, and to break with him, upon these terms.

But let us remember, that this was the saying of our Lord Jesus, whom we all profess to believe, and to imitate in all things; but more especially let us do so in this, because it was not a bare speculation, a fine and glorious saying, like those of the philosophers, who said great and glorious things, but did them not; but this was his constant practice, the great work and business of his life. He who pronounced it the most blessed thing to do good, spent his whole life in this work, and "went about doing good." To this end all his activity and endeavours were bent. This was the life which God himself, when he was pleased to become man, thought fit to lead in the world, giving us herein an example, that we should follow his steps. He made full trial and experience of the happiness of this temper and spirit; for he was all on the giving

hand. He would receive no portion and share of the good things of this world; he refused the greatest offers. When the people would have made him a king, he withdrew and hid himself; he was contented to be worse accommodated than the creatures below us. "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests: but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He would not so much as have any fixed abode and habitation, that he might be at liberty "to go about doing good." He received nothing but injuries and affronts, base and treacherous usage, from an ungrateful world, to whom he was so great and so universal a benefactor. The whole business of his life was to do good, and to suffer evil for so doing. So fixed and steady was he in his own principle and saying, "It is a more blessed thing to give than to receive." He gave away all that he had to do us good, he parted with his glory and his life, "emptied himself, and became of no reputation; and being rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich."

So that he adviseth us nothing, but what he did himself; nor imposeth any thing upon us, from which he himself desired to be excused. And surely we have great reason to be in great love with this pattern, when that very goodness which he propounds to our imitation was all laid out upon us, and redounds to our benefit and advantage; when our salvation and happiness are the effects of that goodness and compassion which he exercised in the world! He did it all purely for our sakes; whereas all the good we do to others, is a greater good done to ourselves.

So that here is an example and experiment of the

thing in the greatest and most famous instance that the whole world can afford. The best and happiest man that ever was, the Son of God and the Saviour of men, and who is the most worthy to be the pattern of all mankind, "went about doing good," and governed his whole life, and all the actions of it, by this principle, that "It is more blessed to give than to receive." "Let the same mind be in us that was in Jesus Christ: let us go and do likewise."

SERMON CCXIII.

THE EVIL OF CORRUPT COMMUNICATION.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth; but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.—EPHES. iv. 29.

As discourses against sin and vice in general are of great use, so it is likewise very necessary to level them against the particular vices of men, and to endeavour by proper and intrinsical arguments, taken from the nature of that vice we treat of, to dissuade and deter them from it; because this carries the discourse home to the consciences of men, and leaves them no way of escape. For this reason, and in compliance with their Majesties' pious proclamation, for the discountenancing and suppressing of profaneness and vice, I have chosen to treat upon this subject, of corrupt and filthy communication, as being one of the reigning vices of this wicked and adulterous generation; of the evil whereof the generality of men are less sensible than almost of any other, that is so frequently and so expressly branded in Scripture. And to this purpose I have pitched upon the words which I have read unto you, as containing a plain and express prohibition of this vice, "Let no corrupt communication," &c.

I remember St. Austin in one of his epistles tells us, that Tully, the great master of the art of speak-

ing, says of one of the great orators, *Nullum unquam verbum quod revocare vellet, emisit:* "That no word ever fell from him that he could wish to have recalled." This I doubt is above the perfection of human eloquence, for a man always to make such a choice of his words, and to place them so fitly, that nothing he ever said could be changed for the better. But the greatest faults of speech are not those which offend against the rules of eloquence, but of piety, and virtue, and good manners; and who can say that his tongue is free from all faults in this kind, and no word ever proceeded from him which he could wish to have recalled? "In many things (says St. James, chap. iii. 2.) we offend all;" and in this kind as much, perhaps, and as often, as in any. He is a good and a happy man indeed, that seldom or never offends with his tongue. "If any man (as St. James goes on) offend not in word, the same is a perfect man;" that is, he hath attained to an eminent degree of virtue indeed, and is above the common rate of men, and may reasonably be presumed blameless in the general course of his life and practice, and "able (as follows) to bridle the whole body;" that is, "to order his whole conversation aright."

To govern the tongue is a matter of great difficulty, and consequently of great wisdom, and care, and circumspection; and therefore, one of the great endeavours of a wise and good man should be, to govern his words by the rules of reason and religion; and we should every one of us resolve and say, as David does, (Psal. xxxix. 1.) "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue." For as the virtues, so the vices of the tongue are many and great. In respect of it, David calls it the best member we have; because, of all the mem-

bers and instruments of the body, it is capable of giving the greatest glory to God, and of doing the greatest good and benefit to men. And in respect of the vices of it, it may be as truly said to be the worst member that we have, because it is capable of doing the greatest dishonour to God, and the greatest mischief and harm among men. So that, upon all accounts, we ought to have a great care of the government of our tongue, which is capable of being so useful and serviceable to the best and worst purposes, according as we restrain it and keep it in order, or let it loose to sin and folly.

And among all the vices of the tongue, as none is more common, so none is more misbecoming, and more contrary to the modesty of a man, and the gravity of a Christian, than filthy and obscene talk; of the odious nature, and the evil and mischievous consequences whereof, both to ourselves and others, I design, by God's assistance, to treat at this time, from the words which I have read unto you,—"Let no corrupt communication," &c.

That by "corrupt (or rotten) communication," is here meant filthy and obscene talk, is generally agreed among interpreters. By "that which is good to the use of edifying," is meant such discourse as is apt to build us up in knowledge and goodness, to make the hearers wiser and better. "That it may minister grace unto the hearers;" that is, such kind of discourse as is acceptable to all; not nauseous and offensive to sober and virtuous persons, not apt to grate upon chaste and modest ears, and to put the hearers out of countenance.

So that the apostle doth here strictly forbid all lewd and filthy discourse amongst Christians; and enjoins them so to converse with one another, that

all their discourses may minister mutual benefit and advantage to one another, and tend to the promoting of piety and virtue; and may likewise be grateful to the hearers, carefully avoiding every thing that might put them to the blush, or any way trespass upon modesty and good manners, as all filthy communication does.

This sort of argument, though it be frequently mentioned in Scripture, yet it is very seldom treated of in the pulpit, because it is a hard matter to be handled in a cleanly manner, and the preacher must always take good heed to himself, that his discourse be free from the contagion of that vice which he reproves and designs to correct and cure. And, therefore, to dissuade and deter men from this evil practice, so rife and common in the world, and that not only amongst the profane and dissolute sort of persons, but those likewise who would seem to be more strict and religious, I hope it may be sufficient to all considerate persons plainly to represent to them the heinous nature of the thing itself, together with the evil and dangerous consequences of it, both to ourselves and to others. And this I shall endeavour to do in the most general and wary terms, keeping all along, as much as possible, aloof and at distance from any thing that might either offend the chaste and modest, or infect lewd and dissolute minds, which, like tinder, are always ready to take fire at the least spark.

Having premised this in general, my work at this time shall be to offer such particular considerations as may fully convince men of the great evil and danger of this practice; and I hope may effectually prevail with them to leave it, and break it off. And they shall be these following:—

I. That all filthy and corrupt communication is evidently contrary to nature, which is careful to hide and suppress whatever, in the general esteem of the sober part of mankind, hath any thing of turpitude and uncomeliness in it; and wherever nature hath thought fit to draw a veil, we should neither by words nor actions expose such things to open view. *Quæ natura occultavit,* (says Tully, de Offic. lib. 1.) *eadem omnes, qui sana sunt mente, removent ab oculis:* "Those things which nature hath thought fit to hide, all men that are in their wits endeavour to keep out of sight." *Nos autem naturam sequamur,* (says the same excellent moralist, *ibid.) et ab omni quod abhorret ab oculorum auriumque approbatione fugiamus:* "Let us (says he) follow nature, and flee every thing that is offensive either to the eye or ear of men." And this is so plain a lesson of nature, that an actor in a play will never fall into that absurdity, as to represent a grave and virtuous person offering any obscene or immodest word: and, as the same author reasons, *Histrio hoc videbit in scena, quod non videbit sapiens in vita?* "Shall an actor see this to be improper upon the stage, and a wise man not discern the absurdity and indecency of it in his life and conversation?"

II. All corrupt and filthy communication is a notorious abuse of one of the greatest and best gifts which God hath given us, and does directly contradict the natural end and use of speech. Our tongue is our glory, as the holy Psalmist often calls it, who hath duly considered the excellency and use of this noble faculty, and took great care to employ it to the purposes to which God gave it, and is herein an admirable pattern to us.

And, next to our reason and understanding, our

speech doth most remarkably distinguish us from the beasts, and sets us above them. *Hoc uno præstamus, vel maxime feris, quod colloquimur inter nos, et quod exprimere dicendo sensa possumus:* (says the great Roman orator, Cicero, de Orat. lib. 1.) "By this one thing we excel the beasts in a very high degree, that we can talk together, and by speech declare our minds to one another." By our understanding we know God, and by our tongues we confess and praise him: but to use our tongues to lewd and filthy discourse, is to pervert and abuse one of the best and noblest faculties which God hath given us; it is to affront him with his own gifts, and to fight against him with his own weapons. "Do we thus requite the Lord? foolish creatures and unthankful!"

The two great ends for which this faculty of speech is given us are, to glorify God our maker, and to edify man our neighbour: but all corrupt communication contradicts both these ends; because, instead of praising God with pure hearts and lips, we do greatly dishonour him, by polluting our tongues with lewd and filthy talk: for hereby we offer a direct affront to his holy nature and laws. This renders us altogether unfit for the worship and service of Almighty God, who is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity" and impurity of any kind. For how can we think that he will accept those prayers and praises which are offered to him by such impure and unhallowed lips; when we dishonour God with the same mouth that we pretend to glorify him; and commit sin with the same tongue that we confess it? How can we hope that he will accept the sacrifice of such polluted lips, out of which proceed things so contrary and so inconsistent?

Those who thus pervert the use of speech, and, instead of glorifying him who gave them this excellent gift, and setting forth his praise, defile their tongues with filthy and impure language, give just occasion to complain of them, as Elihu does of the wicked in his time; (Job xxxv. 10, 11.) "None saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night; who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven?" His meaning is, that they did not glorify God their maker, by singing his praises; which, by being endued with this noble faculty of speech (which he had denied to the creatures below man, the beasts and birds), they only were capable of performing. The consideration of this high privilege, by which we do so much excel the creatures below us, ought to be a mighty obligation upon us to employ this gift of God in the service, and to the glory of the Giver, and make us very careful not to offend him by it, or by any defilement of it, to render it unfit for one of the principal uses for which God bestowed it upon us.

Another great end of speech is to edify our neighbour. So the apostle here tells us in the text, that nothing should proceed out of our mouths, but what is "good for the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." But, instead of that, corrupt communication offends the chaste and virtuous, and corrupts them who have vicious inclinations, by exciting and cherishing lewd imaginations in them, and making them that are filthy more filthy still.

III. Corrupt communication is an evidence of a corrupt and impure heart, as polluted streams are a sign that the fountain is impure from whence they

came. An impure mind may be covered and disguised by natural shame and outward reverence, in regard to the company, or from some other particular design; but when it breaks out at any time in lewd talk, our speech betrays us, and discovers the inward thoughts of our hearts, and makes them visible to every eye. For, as our Saviour says, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh:" (Matt. xii. 34, 35.) "How can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things: and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things."

"There is not (says an excellent divine of our own, Dr. Barrow) a more certain sign of a mind utterly debauched from piety and virtue, than affecting such talk. A vain mind naturally venteth itself in frothy discourse; and lust boiling within, foams out in filthy talk." It is St. Jude's metaphor, when he describes that impure sect of the gnostics, he says of them, that "they were continually foaming out their own shame;" (ver. 13.) that is, by their lewd words and deeds they discovered the inward filthiness of their hearts. And, therefore, it is Tully's advice to him that would be perfectly virtuous, and not defective in any part of his duty, *Imprimis provideat, ne sermo vitium aliquod indicet inesse moribus:* (de Offic. lib. i.) "Let him in the first place (says he) take great care that his speech betray not some vice or fault in his manners." Ἀνδρὸς χαρακτὴρ ἐκ λόγου γνωριζεται: "A man's character is commonly taken from his talk." Οἷος ὁ τρόπος τοιοῦτος καὶ ὁ λόγος (says Aristides); "Such as are the manners of a man, such is his discourse:" and Quintilian, (lib. xi. c. 1.)

Profert enim mores plerumque oratio, et animi secreta detegit, nec sine causa Græci prodiderunt, ut vivit, quenquam etiam dicere: " Our speech, for the most part, declares our manners, and discovers the secrets of our hearts; so that not without cause was it become a proverbial saying among the Greeks, that, " As the man lives, so also he speaks." And to the same purpose, the wise son of Sirach: (Ecclus. xxvii. 6, 7.) " The fruit declareth if the tree hath been dressed; so is the utterance of a conceit in the heart of man. Praise no man before thou hearest him speak: for this is the trial of men." And, (ver. 13.) " The discourse of fools is irksome, and their sport is in the wantonness of sin."

Immodest speech is not only an indication of an unchaste mind; but draws, likewise, a great suspicion upon a man's life. So strict a connexion commonly is there between a man's thoughts and words, and between his words and actions, that they are generally presumed to be all of a piece, and agreeable to one another.

IV. Corrupt communication doth debauch and defile the minds of men, and that not only of the speaker, but likewise of the hearer of such discourse; because it gratifies and feeds a corrupt humour and a vitiated appetite, besides that it disposeth and inclines to lewd and filthy actions: a smutty tongue and unchaste deeds are seldom far asunder, and do very often go together; for filthy talk and lewd practices seem to differ only in the occasion and opportunity; and he that makes no conscience of the one, will hardly stick at the other, when it can be done with secr ecy andsafety. The law of God forbids both alike, and his eye beholds both; " For there is not a word in my tongue

(says David, Psal. cxxxix. 4.) but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether." So that whatever may deter us from lewd practice (the authority of God forbidding it, or the awe of his presence, who continually stands by us, and hears and sees all that we say and do), is of equal force to restrain us from lewd and filthy words: for they both proceed from the same ill disposition of mind, and are done in equal contempt of the Divine presence and authority.

V. It is uncivil and unmannerly, very disagreeable, and highly displeasing to all sober and modest persons. It is a clownish and rude thing, says Tully, (de Offic. lib. i.) *Si rerum turpitudini adhibetur verborum obscœnitas:* "If to things which are immodest in themselves, we add the obscenity of words."

Nothing that trespasses upon the modesty of the company, and the decency of conversation, can become the mouth of a wise and virtuous person. This kind of conversation would fain pass for wit among some sort of persons, to whom it is acceptable; but whatever savours of rudeness, and immodesty, and ill manners, is very far from deserving that name; and they that are sober and virtuous, cannot entertain any discourse of this kind with approbation and acceptance: a well-bred person will never offend in this way; and therefore it cannot but be esteemed as an affront to modest company, and a rude presuming upon their approbation, impudently taking it for granted that all others are as lewd and dissolute as themselves.

This sort of conversation was not only offensive to righteous Lot, but was a perpetual vexation to him, and grieved him at his very heart. So St.

Peter tells us, (2 Pet. ii. 7, 8.) that Lot was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked. For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." "In seeing and hearing;" that is, in seeing their lewd actions, and hearing their filthy talk, his life became a burden to him; and, therefore, God singled him out, and delivered him both from that wicked company, and from that dreadful judgment of fire and brimstone, which came down from heaven upon them, and consumed them with an utter destruction, for an example to all ages, and an admonition to all good men, that they ought to be in like manner affected, as righteous Lot was, with "the filthy conversation of the wicked."

VI. As by this practice we offend against nature and reason and true morality; so it is likewise a direct contempt and defiance of the Christian religion, which does so strictly forbid, and so severely condemn it in Christians. Our blessed Saviour seems more particularly to censure and condemn this vice, when he says, (Matt. xii. 36.) "That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment." "Every idle word," ῥῆμα ἀργὸν, "every vain and unprofitable word," that no way tends to edification; that is the very lowest sense the words can bear. But then how much more shall we give an account in that day of every lewd word, which tends to corrupt and debauch the minds and manners of men! Some copies have it, ῥῆμα πονηρὸν, "every naughty and wicked word," every false, and malicious, and calumniating word: "An idle word (says St. Basil) is that which is not for edification, and such

words shall come under examination in that great assembly of the whole world; and what then (says he) shall be done to words of scurrility, and calumny, and obscenity?"

But that which will best direct us to the meaning of this phrase, is what the Jewish masters observed, that, by an idle word, the Jews did commonly understand immodest and unchaste speech, scurrilous and obscene words. And then it follows, "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

Men are commonly apt to make a very light matter of such words; but because they shew the mind and manners of the man, his inward temper and disposition, therefore men shall be called to a strict account for them in the day of judgment, and be condemned for lewd and dissolute words, as well as for acts of filthiness and uncleanness; because "these come from the heart, and defile the man," they proceed from an impure spring and fountain; and though we only perceive them to come out of the mouth, yet they proceed "out of the abundance of the heart," from an evil disposition of mind.

So that our Judge hath expressly warned us of this fault, and declared to us the danger of it. And, therefore, whosoever believes this declaration of our Saviour, and dreads the judgment of the great day, ought to take heed that he offend not with his tongue, in this or any other kind. Men make but little account of such words now, but they shall all be strictly accounted for another day; and what we utter now so freely and without blushing, will then strike us dumb, and be matter of the greatest shame and confusion to us, in the presence of God and his holy angels.

And so St. Paul, likewise, not only here in the text, does forbid and reprove this practice, when he says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth: but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers:" but in several other places of his Epistles he most severely condemns it, as utterly misbecoming Christians, and most directly contrary to our most holy profession. (Eph. v. 3, 4.) "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not once be named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient." Here he forbids all lewd and filthy talk, as utterly misbecoming the conversation of Christians, who should give no occasion to have the vices of this nature so much as once mentioned, much less practised among Christians; let not these things, says he, "be once named among you, as becometh saints; but rather giving of thanks." Here he directs us to that which is the proper employment of the tongue, and one of the chief ends of speech; which is to praise and glorify God, and not to dishonour him by lewd and filthy talk. And this he urgeth again, as the proper fruit of our lips: (ver. 20.) "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And at the 5th verse of this chapter he appeals to Christians, whether they had not been constantly taught and instructed, that all lewdness and filthiness, not only in act but in word, will certainly shut men out of the kingdom of heaven. "For this (says he,) ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, (referring to those several sorts of uncleanness he had mentioned before; among which is filthy

and foolish talk) hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God." The apostle here speaks to the gentile Christians, who were newly converted from heathenism, and had been accustomed to make slight of these kinds of sin, which were so common among the idolatrous heathen, and part of the worship of their obscene deities: but he tells them that the Christian religion which they had embraced, required another sort of conversation, and did strictly enjoin all manner of purity, both of heart and life, in all our words and actions; and that "as he that hath called us is holy, so we should be holy in all manner of conversation." And whatever false teachers might insinuate, as if the Christian religion did allow a greater liberty in these things, and made that "a cloak for licentiousness," hereby "turning the grace of God," that is, the doctrine of the gospel, "into lasciviousness," as St. Jude speaks, (ver. 4.) yet they would certainly find things quite otherwise in the issue, and that God, who punished the heathen for these vices, and sent such terrible judgments upon them, would much less let Christians go unpunished, that should be found guilty of them: (Ephes. v. 6.) "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience;" that is, the heathen world, who continued still in their infidelity, and lived in the practice of those sins; and would fall much more heavily upon Christians, if, after they had embraced this holy religion, they should allow themselves in any of those vile and impure practices, which they had been guilty of before, and which they had so solemnly promised to renounce and put off in their baptism.

And so likewise, (Coloss. iii. 5—7.) " Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience," or unbelief; " in the which ye also walked sometime, when ye lived in them;" that is, whilst ye were heathens, and conversed among them, ye practised these vices; " but now," that is, now that you are become Christians, " put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, evil-speaking, filthy communication." Ye see that " filthy communication" is reckoned among those sins of the gentiles, which Christians were utterly to quit and forsake, as contrary to the purity of the Christian profession. And so St. Paul tells the Thessalonians; (1 Thess. iv. 7.) " God hath not called us unto uncleanness; but unto holiness." And he gives the same precept to the Colossians: (chap. iv. 6.) " Let your speech be always with grace," that is, acceptable and useful, something that is worthy the hearing, " seasoned with salt," that is with prudence and discretion, which should always govern our speech, and keep it within the bounds of sobriety and modesty. As our talk should not be insipid and foolish, so much less rotten and unsavoury, immodest and lewd.

And in his Epistle to the Philippians, (chap. iv. 8.) he earnestly recommends the virtues that are directly contrary to this vice: " Finally, my brethren, whatsoever things are honest, ὅσα σεμνὰ, whatsoever things are grave or venerable, ὅσα ἁγνὰ, whatsoever things are pure or chaste, think on these things;" that is, have great regard to them in your conversation and behaviour, there being no sort of virtue

which the Christian religion does not strictly enjoin and exact from us; and consequently, whatsoever is light and frothy, and much more whatever is lewd and filthy, ought to be banished from the conversation of Christians, as utterly inconsistent with the gravity and purity of that holy profession.

And the same apostle tells us, that all the promises of the gospel are so many arguments and obligations to purity and holiness: (2 Cor. vii. 1.) "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting," or practising, "holiness in the fear of God." And on the contrary, St. John tells us, that all impurity will be an effectual bar to our entrance into heaven; (Rev. xxi. 27.) speaking of the new Jerusalem, he says, "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination." So that, if either the promises or threatenings of the gospel have any influence upon us, they will effectually restrain this vicious practice.

VII. And lastly, All impure and filthy communication grieves the Holy Spirit, and drives him away from us. And therefore, after he had forbidden this vice here in the text, that "no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers;" he immediately adds, "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption;" hereby intimating, that all corrupt and filthy communication "grieves the Holy Spirit of God," that blessed Spirit which is "the seal and earnest of our redemption;" that is, as the apostle himself explains it, of "the redemption of our bodies, from the bondage of corruption,"

by the resurrection of them to eternal life. For it is the Spirit of God dwelling in us, which shall raise our bodies at the last day, and make them partakers of a blessed immortality. So the apostle says expressly : (Rom. viii. 11.) " But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you ; he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." If we defile our bodies, or any members of them by uncleanness, we " grieve the Spirit of God which dwells in us," and force him out of his habitation ; that blessed Spirit, which should " quicken our mortal bodies," and is both the earnest and the cause of their resurrection to eternal life. For our bodies, as well as our souls, are " the temples of the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit of God dwells in them ;" and we banish him out of his temple whenever we profane it by lewd and filthy speech.

And the apostle useth this argument more than once, to deter Christians more especially from the sins of uncleanness. (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.) " Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you ? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." The Holy Spirit of God sanctifieth the place where he more especially resides, and makes it his temple ; and so are our bodies as well as our souls ; as the same apostle expressly tells us ; (chap. vi. ver. 18—20.) where he argues against the sins of uncleanness, which are committed in the body, and by the members and instruments of it, from this consideration, that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. " Flee fornication," says he. " Every sin a man doeth,

is without the body: but he that committeth fornication, sinneth against his own body;" that is, the body is not the immediate instrument of other sins, as it is of those of uncleanness; and then it follows, "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Under the name of fornication the apostle comprehends all the sins of uncleanness, of which any member of the body is an instrument: so that the lasciviousness of the eye, or ear, or tongue, is a polluting and profaning this temple of God, and drives the Holy Spirit of God out of his possession.

And whenever the Spirit of God departs from us, we cease to be the children of God, and forfeit the earnest of our eternal inheritance. "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ," says the same apostle, (Rom. viii. 8, 9.) "he is none of his;" that is, he does not belong to him; in plain English, he is no Christian. So that, as we would not forfeit the title of Christians, and the blessed hope of a glorious resurrection, we must be very careful that "no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouth," lest hereby we "grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by which we are sealed unto the day of redemption."

I have now done with this argument, and what I have said concerning immodest and unchaste words, is of equal force against lascivious books, and pictures, and plays; all which do alike intrench upon natural modesty, and for that reason are equally forbidden and condemned by the Christian religion; and therefore it may suffice to have named them. I

shall only speak a few words concerning plays, which, as they are now ordered among us, are a mighty reproach to the age and nation.

To speak against them in general, may be thought too severe, and that which the present age cannot so well brook, and would not perhaps be so just and reasonable; because it is very possible, they might be so framed, and governed by such rules, as not only to be innocently diverting, but instructing and useful, to put some vices and follies out of countenance, which cannot perhaps be so decently reproved, nor so effectually exposed and corrected any other way. But as the stage now is, they are intolerable, and not fit to be permitted in a civilized, much less in a Christian nation. They do most notoriously minister both to infidelity and vice. By the profaneness of them, they are apt to instil bad principles into the minds of men, and to lessen the awe and reverence which all men ought to have for God and religion: and by their lewdness they teach vice, and are apt to infect the minds of men, and dispose them to lewd and dissolute practices.

And therefore I do not see, how any person, pretending to sobriety and virtue, and especially to the pure and holy religion of our blessed Saviour, can, without great guilt, and open contradiction to his holy profession, be present at such lewd and immodest plays, much less frequent them, as too many do, who yet would take it very ill to be shut out of the communion of Christians, as they would most certainly have been in the first and purest ages of Christianity.

To conclude this whole discourse: Let us always remember, that gravity and modesty in all our beha-

viour and conversation, in all our words and actions, are duties indispensably required by the Christian religion, and the great fences of piety and virtue, and therefore ought with great conscience and care to be preserved and kept inviolable: and when these fences are once broken down, there is a wide gap made for almost any sin and vice to enter in. Immodest words do naturally tend to "corrupt good manners," both in ourselves and others.

There is none of us, but would reckon it a very great infelicity to be deprived of that noble and useful faculty of speech, which is so peculiar to man, and which, next to our reason and understanding, doth most remarkably distinguish us from the brute beasts: but it is a much greater unhappiness to have this faculty, and to abuse it to vile and lewd purposes. The first may be only our misfortune: but this can never be without great fault, and gross neglect of ourselves; and much better had it been for us to have been born dumb, than thus "to turn our glory into shame" and guilt, by perverting this excellent gift of God, to the corrupting ourselves and others.

This I hope may be sufficient to restrain men from this vice, which I have all this while been speaking against; at least to preserve those which are not yet infected from the contagion of it; and I hope to reclaim many from so bad a practice. And if any be so hardened in their lewd course, that no counsel of this kind can make impression on them, what remains, but to conclude in the words of the angel to St. John, (Rev. xxii. 11.) "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still!"

SERMON CCXIV.

THE TRUE REMEDY AGAINST THE TROUBLES OF LIFE.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.—JOHN xiv. 1.

IN which words our blessed Saviour does, upon a particular occasion, prescribe an universal remedy against trouble. And the particular occasion of this consolatory discourse which our Saviour here makes to his disciples, was this: he had often told them of his sufferings; but the conceit which they had entertained of his temporal reign, would not suffer them to admit any thought of such a thing as the sufferings or death of the Messias; and therefore it is said, that "these things did not sink into them," and that "they understood them not;" men being generally very slow to understand what they do not like, and have no mind to. At last our Saviour tells them plainly, that how backward soever they were to believe it, the time of his sufferings and death was now approaching, and that he should shortly be "betrayed into the hands of men," and be "crucified and slain." At this his disciples were struck with great fear, and exceedingly troubled, both in contemplation of his sufferings, and of their own invaluable loss. To comfort them upon this occasion, our Saviour directs his disciples to that course, which was not only proper in their present case, but is an universal antidote and remedy

against all trouble whatsoever, and will not only serve to mitigate our trouble, and support our spirits under the fear and apprehension of future evils, but under present afflictions and sufferings; and to quiet and comfort our minds under the saddest condition, and sorest calamities, that can befal us: "Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

He does not only forbid them to be troubled, and counsel them against it, such advice is easily given, but not so easily to be followed: but he prescribes the proper remedy against trouble, which is trust and confidence in God, the great Creator and wise Governor of the world; and likewise in himself, the blessed Son of God, and Saviour of mankind, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

The words are variously translated: by some indicatively, "Ye do believe in God, and ye do believe in me," therefore "be not troubled;" by others imperatively, "Believe in God, and believe likewise in me;" and then you can have no cause of trouble. Or else the first clause may be rendered indicatively, and the latter imperatively; and so our translation renders the words, "Ye do believe in God, believe also in me;" as you believe in God, the Creator and Governor of the world, so "believe also in me," the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. But which way soever the words be rendered, the sense comes all to one; that faith in God, and in our blessed Saviour, are here prescribed as the proper and most powerful remedies against trouble: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

In the handling of these words I shall do these two things:—

First, I shall consider what sort of trouble is here forbidden, or with what reasonable limitations this general prohibition of our Saviour is to be understood, "Let not your heart be troubled."

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew what virtue and force there are in the remedy here prescribed by our Saviour, to mitigate and allay our trouble, and to support and quiet our minds under it.

First, We will consider what sort of trouble is here forbidden, and with what due and reasonable limitations we are to understand this general prohibition of our Saviour to his disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled." And this we shall best find out by considering the various objects of trouble, together with the several causes or grounds of them. And these may all be ranged under these three heads; evils past, present, or to come. For the ground of all trouble is some evil, either really and in itself so, or what is apprehended by us under that notion: and the several kinds of trouble, are either the reflection upon evils past, or the sense of an evil that is present, or the fear and apprehension of some future evil which threatens us and hangs over us.

I. For the first, The trouble caused by reflection upon evils past, this must either be the evil of affliction or sin. The former of these, when it is past, is seldom any cause of trouble, the remembrance of past sufferings, and the evils which we got over, being rather delightful than grievous; so that it is only the evil of sin, the reflection whereof is troublesome. And this is that which we call guilt, which is an inward vexation, and discontent, and grief of mind, arising from the consciousness that we have done amiss, and a fearful apprehension of some vengeance and punishment that will follow it; and there

is no trouble that is comparable to this, when the conscience of a sinner is thoroughly awakened.

Now upon this account our hearts ought to be troubled, and we can hardly exceed in it, provided our trouble do not drive us to despair, but to repentance: but there can be no suspicion that this comes within the compass of our Saviour's prohibition.

II. As for the troubles caused by the sense of present evils, either of loss or suffering, though this do properly enough fall within the compass of our Saviour's prohibition, "Let not your heart be troubled," yet it admits of several limitations: therefore, in order to the fixing of its due and proper bounds, I shall briefly shew, what trouble for present evils and afflictions which are upon us is not forbidden, and what is.

1. We are not here forbidden to have a just and due sense of any evil or calamity that is upon us; because this is natural, and we cannot help it; for there is a real difference of things in themselves; some things are in their nature good and convenient for us, and agreeable and delightful to our senses; and other things are in themselves evil, that is, naturally displeasing and grievous; and we must not only be stoics, but even stocks and stones, if we have not a just sense and resentment of this difference. Our blessed Saviour had so; and as he was afflicted more than any man, and suffered more than any of the sons of men, so was he likewise very sensible of his sufferings, and had a natural dread and horror of them; insomuch, that he himself tells us, that "his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even to death," upon the apprehension of what he was to undergo; which made him pray so earnestly, and

to repeat that petition so often; "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Nay, the very anguish of his mind, caused by the dread and horror of his sufferings, was so great, as to force blood through the pores of his body, so that "he sweat as it were thick drops of blood falling upon the ground."

And this is not to be wondered at, because our blessed Saviour, as he had the greatest endowments of human nature in their greatest perfection, so he had a perfect sense of the evils and pains and sufferings of it. And all philosophy that will not acknowledge loss, and pain, and suffering, to be evils, and troublesome and terrible, is either obstinate sullenness, or gross hypocrisy.

2. Nor doth this prohibition of our Saviour exclude natural affection. This is a plant which God himself hath planted in human nature, and that for very excellent ends and purposes; and having made us men, and endowed us with such passions, he does not expect that we should put off our nature, and transform ourselves into another sort of creatures than what we were when we came out of his own hands. To be without natural affection, and to have no affective sense of the loss of the nearest relations, is condemned in Scripture, as a mark of the greatest degeneracy and depravation of human nature. And therefore we cannot imagine that our Saviour did intend to forbid such a moderate and well regulated degree of trouble upon these occasions, as is the proper and genuine issue of those natural affections, which God himself hath implanted in us.

3. When our Saviour forbids us to be troubled, he doth not forbid us to have a just sense of God's judgments, or of his hand, in procuring or permit-

ting the evils which befal us; much less of our own sins, which are the meritorious cause of them; nay, on the contrary, he expects that we should acknowledge his providence, and the justness of it, in his severest dealings with us; that we should be "humbled under his mighty hand, and turn to him that smites us," and "bear the indignation of the Lord patiently, because we have sinned against him." Whatever is a sign of God's displeasure against us, is a just and reasonable cause of trouble to us.

But when our Saviour here forbids us to be troubled, he plainly intends to prohibit these three things:

1. Immoderate grief and sorrow for any present affliction or loss, without any restraint upon ourselves, so as to let grief loose, and to give full scope to it, to let the reins fall out of our hands, so that the considerations of reason and religion have no manner of power and command over us; to sorrow, as Rachel did for her children, "refusing to be comforted." This is unreasonable, and usually of pernicious consequence: for no man knows, when he once abandons himself to melancholy, and gives way to grief, and lets it pierce his heart, and enter into his soul, how it may overwhelm his spirit, and sink it past recovery. And to this pitch the trouble of some men for worldly losses and disappointments, because it was not restrained and governed at first, hath brought them; and it often happens, as St. Paul hath observed, the "trouble of the world worketh death."

I think hardly any man did ever die of grief for his sins, and killed himself by laying them to heart. It is well if our sorrow for sin proceed to that degree, as to work real repentance and amendment. And

the reason why our sorrow for sin is commonly moderate and within bounds, is because the sorrow and trouble of repentance is always reasonable, and reason keeps our grief within bounds; but "the sorrow of the world," that is, of covetous and worldly-minded men, who have unreasonably set their affections upon this world, hath nothing to set bounds and give limits to it. And therefore, by the just judgment of God, it sometimes proceeds so far as to work death. Many men's hearts have been broken for the loss of an estate, or some great cross and disappointment in their worldly affairs and designs. Thus Nabal, upon the very apprehension of the danger that he and his estate were in, and had so narrowly escaped, was struck with grief to the degree of stupidity, so that "his heart died within him, and he became as a stone;" and in a few days he died of that grief.

2. We are not to be troubled for present afflictions and sufferings to the degree of impatience and discontent, so as to fret and murmur in our hearts against God, and "to charge him foolishly," as if he dealt hardly with us, and had not a due regard for us, and an equal consideration of our case. For we are all sinners, and always deserve to suffer; and therefore whatever temporal evils befal the best men in this world, they are always "less than their iniquities have deserved:" and yet men are very prone to censure and find fault with God, for the evils and calamities which they draw down upon themselves. So Solomon observes, (Prov. xix. 3.) "The foolishness of man perverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against the Lord." We suffer for our own sins and follies, and then are angry with God because we suffer. God is angry with us for

our sins, and when he is angry with us, and "lifts up his hand against us," it becomes us "to humble ourselves under his mighty hand;" for "who can stand before him when once he is angry?" But we have no cause to fret against him, for the evils which we bring upon ourselves: besides that, fretting is not the way to relieve and ease us, but to vex and gall us the more.

3. As to the fear and apprehension of future evils, though we ought to have a just sense of them, yet we ought not to be dejected and troubled for them to the degree of despondency, so as to conclude ourselves miserable and forsaken, utterly lost and undone, and that our case is past all help and remedy: we should not be so dejected, as if we were destitute of all comfort, and utterly without hope. Hope lies at the bottom of the worst condition; for while we are not without God, we can never be without hope; so long as the government of the world is in so good hands, our case can never be desperate; and therefore we ought to rebuke the despondency of our spirits, as David did, (Psal. xliii. 5.) "Why art thou so cast down, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? hope in God." And we should support ourselves in the greatest dangers and fears as he did, (Psal. iii. 1—3.) "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! how many are they that rise up against me! Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me, my glory, and the lifter up of my head."

And this cause of trouble upon the fear and apprehension of future evils, was the case of the disciples, who were mightily dejected and disturbed, upon the apprehension of the destitute condition

they should be in upon our Saviour's departure from them; that they should be exposed to a malicious world, without all manner of protection from those innumerable evils and dangers which threatened them. And this I shall have most particular respect to in my following discourse, as being more particularly intended by our Saviour, and being one of the most common causes of trouble in this world. I proceed, therefore, in the

Second place, To consider, what force there is in the remedy here prescribed by our Saviour, to mitigate and allay our troubles, both in respect of our present evils and sufferings, and the danger and apprehension of future evils, and to support and comfort our minds under them. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

In which words our Saviour prescribes a double remedy against trouble.

First, Faith in God, the great Creator and wise Governor of the world. "Ye believe in God," or, "Believe ye in God," to which he adds, in the

Second place, Faith likewise in himself, the Son of God, and the Saviour of men. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." Not as if faith in God were not a sufficient ground of consolation and support to our minds, but to acquaint us, that a firm faith in him who is the Son of God and Saviour of the world, would very much tend to confirm and strengthen our trust and confidence in God; as will clearly appear, when I come to shew what peculiar consideration of comfort and support the Christian religion offers to us, beyond what the common light and reason of mankind, from the considerations of the Divine nature and perfections, do suggest to us. And to explain the full strength

and force of these two considerations, I shall do these two things:

First, I shall endeavour to shew, What considerations of comfort and support the belief of a God, and the natural notions and acknowledgments of mankind concerning him, do afford to good men, for the allaying and mitigating of their fears and troubles. And,

Secondly, What farther considerations faith in Christ, and the firm belief of the Christian religion, do afford to this purpose. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

First, To shew, what considerations of comfort and support the belief of a God, and the natural notions and acknowledgments of mankind concerning him, do afford to good men, for the allaying and mitigating of their fears and troubles; which I shall briefly deduce thus:

The firm belief and persuasion of a God, does necessarily infer the belief of his infinite power, and wisdom, and holiness, and goodness; for these are necessary and essential perfections of the Divine nature, without which we cannot conceive such a being as God is. Now from these essential perfections of the Divine nature, these two principles do naturally result:

I. That his providence governs the world, and administers the affairs of it, particularly of mankind, with great goodness and wisdom.

II. That his providence is more peculiarly concerned for good men, and that he hath a very tender and particular care of them, and regard to them.

Now these two principles, concerning which I have discoursed at large upon another occasion,*

* See Sermon CXXXVII. vol. vi. p. 438.

afford us this fourfold ground of comfort, under all the evils that we labour under, and are afraid of.

1. If God govern the world, then we and all our interests and concernments are certainly in the best and safest hands; and where, if we knew how to wish well and wisely for ourselves, we should desire to have them; and therefore, why should our hearts be troubled at any thing that doth or can befal us?*

2. Another ground of comfort is, that if the providence of God have a particular regard to good men, and favour for them, then we may be assured, that if we be careful of our duty to God, and rely upon his goodness, and refer ourselves to his pleasure, in the final issue and result of things, all shall turn to our good, and conspire in our happiness: nay, if we make the best use of the evils and afflictions which befal us, and bear them as we ought, we ourselves may do a great deal to turn them to our benefit and advantage; to the bettering of our minds, and the improvement of our virtues, and the increase of our reward. And why should we be troubled so much at things which may prove so many ways beneficial to us, if it be not our own fault? which tend to our good, and will end in it, if we will but "let patience have its perfect work," as St. James shews, (chap. v. 11.) in the instance of Job, whose admirable patience had a glorious end and reward, even in this world; "You have heard (says he) of the patience of Job, and of the end God made with him; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." Job, upon a dunghill, is no whit inferior to the most glorious prince that ever sat upon a throne. Some men have been more

* See this matter also handled at large in the beforementioned Sermon.

illustrious, and, according to the true rate and value of things, more considerable for their patience, and courage, and constancy of mind, in great afflictions and sufferings, than the greatest pomp and prosperity in the world could possibly have made them. Some have borne poverty, and sickness, and reproach, and persecution, and exquisite pain and torments, with so much decency, with such greatness of mind, and firmness of resolution, as might justly provoke the envy of the greatest and wealthiest, and, to all outward appearance, the happiest persons that ever were in the world. M. Antoninus was an excellent good man, and perhaps the greatest emperor that ever was, for in his time the Roman empire was at its greatest extent; and yet it is hard to say, whether Epictetus, whose example I proposed before, and who lived about the same time with this great and good emperor: I say, it is not easy to say, whether this poor man, Epictetus, who was depressed into the lowest and most afflicted condition that human nature is almost capable of, were not, by reason of those admirable virtues which shined so brightly in that dark and dismal condition, his invincible patience, his perfect submission to the providence of God, the perpetual cheerfulness and serenity, the unmoveable constancy and equality of his mind, according to a right estimation of things, the greater and more glorious person of the two.

So that good men are always secure, as to the main and the essentials of happiness; under all outward afflictions and sufferings of the body, they may still retain a wise and virtuous mind, which is "that good part which cannot be taken from them;" and if they retain that, they are sure of the favour of

God, and the countenance of Heaven, which alone are sufficient to make any condition happy.

3. Another ground of comfort is, that if God govern the world, he can either prevent or divert the greatest evils that threaten us; or if they come upon us, he can support us under them, and deliver us out of them: and if we be good, and it be for our good, he will do one of these for us; either he will prevent the evil, that it shall not come, if that be best for us; or if the affliction fall heavy upon us, he will support us under it: and if our strength be increased in proportion to the weight of our burthen, it is as well as if we had escaped it, nay, perhaps, much better, considering the benefit and reward of it. But how grievous soever it be, he can, when he pleaseth, deliver us from it; and he will do it presently if it be for our good; and if it be not, it is not really desirable to us to be so soon freed from it.

4. And lastly, which is consequent upon the former particulars, it is certain, upon the whole matter, and upon the balancing of all accounts, that in every condition good men have much more cause of comfort and joy, than of dejection and trouble. Let our fears be as great, and our present sufferings as heavy as they can, there are considerations of so great moment to be put into the other scale, as will infinitely outweigh them, and make them seem light. The considerations of our immortal duration in a future state, and of the endless and unspeakable happiness of another world, are of that solidity and weight, that "these light afflictions," as the apostle calls them, "which are but for a moment, are in no wise worthy to be compared with them."

What though our passage through this world be

never so stormy and tempestuous, we shall at last arrive at a safe port. Heaven is a sure sanctuary and retreat from all the evils and afflictions which we are liable to, and which many times pursue us so close in this mortal state. It is but exercising our faith and patience for a very little while, and all will be well with us; much better than if we had never been afflicted, and had been wholly exempted from all sorts of sufferings in this world. We have no pretence to "the crown of life," if we do not overcome; and there can be no conquest without some conflict.

But because the Christian religion does give us the greatest, if not the only firm assurance of the happiness of another life, which, when all is done, is the great support and cordial of our fainting spirits, under the troubles and afflictions of this life, therefore I shall not now enlarge farther upon it, but refer it to the second head of my discourse, which I proposed to speak to in the next place, viz. What farther considerations of comfort and support, faith in Christ, and the firm belief of the Christian religion, do afford to good men for the allaying and mitigating of their fears and troubles. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." But this I shall refer to some other opportunity.

SERMON CCXV.

THE TRUE REMEDY AGAINST THE TROUBLES OF LIFE.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.—JOHN xiv. 1.

I HAVE considered these words as an universal remedy against trouble: and in shewing what virtue and force there are in this remedy, I have considered,

First, That faith in God is a proper and most powerful means to mitigate and allay our trouble, and to support and quiet our minds under it.

I now proceed, in the second place, to shew what farther considerations of comfort and support, faith in Christ, and the firm belief of the Christian religion, do afford good men, for the allaying and mitigating of their greatest fears and troubles. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." I shall mention these five:

I. Faith in Christ, or the belief of the Christian religion, gives us full and perfect assurance of immortality, and of the glorious and eternal rewards of another world.

II. It promiseth to every sincere Christian the inward assistance, and support, and comfort, of God's Holy Spirit, to bear up the weakness of human nature under its heaviest pressures of fear, or grief, or pain.

III. It assures us of the special efficacy of our prayers with God, either for our deliverance from

trouble, or for the aids and supports of his grace under it.

IV. It propounds to us the best and most admirable pattern that ever was, of patience and constancy of mind under the apprehension of approaching evils, or the sense of present sufferings; and of a contented and cheerful submission to the will of God, in the saddest condition to which human nature is incident.

V. It assures us of a most compassionate, and prevalent, and perpetual patron, and advocate, and intercessor with God for us.

I. Faith in Christ, or the doctrine of the Christian religion, gives a full and perfect assurance of immortality, and of the glorious and eternal rewards of another world. Of this the world was very doubtful and uncertain before, and had but obscure and wavering apprehensions about it. And though the generality of mankind had naturally some glimmering apprehensions of another life after this, and secret hopes and expectations of a future reward for good men that were hardly used in this world; yet the philosophers had wrangled and disputed the matter into so much uncertainty, that mankind were very much staggered about it, and the doubts and difficulties that were raised about it did very much break the force and weaken the influence of so weighty a consideration.

Thus it was among the gentiles. And under the law of Moses, though the Jews had such apprehensions of their own immortality, and of a future state of rewards and punishments, as natural light suggested to them; yet that covenant and dispensation added but very little to the clearing of those notions, and the strengthening of this persuasion in

the minds of men; it did rather suppose it, than add any new strength and force to it: for, under that dispensation, the eyes of men were generally fixed upon temporal promises and threatenings: though, as the times of the Messias grew nearer, and the sufferings of that people sharper, they began to have clearer apprehensions of a resurrection to another and better life; it being natural to men when they are destitute of present comfort, to cherish and make much of the future hopes of a better condition.

And, therefore, we find that the people of the Jews, when they had been long exercised with great afflictions, began to comfort and support themselves with the hopes of a blessed resurrection to a better life; as is evident from the history of the seven brethren in the Maccabees, who, with great patience and courage, bore up under the most exquisite torments, in confidence of being raised again to a blessed state in another world. And of these it is the apostle certainly speaks, (Heb. xi. 35.) when he says, that "some were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection."

But the apostle tells us expressly, (2 Tim. i. 10.) that the clear and certain discovery of a future state is owing to the Christian religion, and "made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel." Not only natural light, but all the revelations which God had made to the world before, had this weakness and imperfection in them, that they did not give men the clear discovery and full assurance of another life; and consequently, had but little efficacy in

comparison to engage men to their duty, or to support and comfort them under their sufferings: and therefore the apostle to the Hebrews calls the gospel, in opposition to the law, "the power of an endless life," (Heb. vii. 16.) intimating to us, how great a force and influence the clear apprehensions of another life are apt to have upon the minds of men. For which reason, the same apostle tells us, (ver. 18, 19.) that the law was too weak to raise men to the perfection of virtue and goodness, because it did not work strongly enough upon the hopes of men, by the greatness and clearness of its promises; and that for this weakness it was removed, and a more powerful and awakening dispensation brought in the place of it: "For verily (says he), there is an annulling of the commandment going before," meaning the law of Moses, which by the gospel was abrogated and made void, "for the weakness and unprofitableness of it; for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did." For which reason, (chap. viii. 6.) he calls the covenant of the gospel, "a better covenant," because it "was established upon better promises," viz. "the promise of an eternal inheritance," as the same apostle speaks, (chap. ix. 15.) All the express promises of the law were only of temporal good things, but the promises of the gospel are of eternal life and happiness: "This is the promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life," says St. John, (1 John ii. 25.)

Now the firm persuasion of another life, does not only answer that great difficulty and objection against the providence of God, from the seeming injustice and inequality of his dealings with good and bad men in this world, because the eternal re-

wards and punishments of another world will set all things straight, and make abundant amends to good men, for all their sufferings and afflictions here; and will render the past prosperity of bad men one of the greatest aggravations of their misery: as it is said of Babylon, (Rev. xviii. 7.) "How much she hath glorified herself and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her." In like manner God will deal with wicked men in another world; their torments shall rise in proportion to the pleasure and prosperity they have enjoyed and abused in this world. This remarkable change of condition which shall befal good and bad men in another world, is set forth to us in a very lively and affecting manner in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; (Luke xvi. 25.) where Abraham is represented speaking thus to the rich man; "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." "He is comforted" in proportion to his sufferings in this world: "and thou art tormented" in proportion to the sensual pleasures and luxuries of thy former life. Men under great want and sufferings, are apt to think their lot in this world very hard, and yet upon the whole matter, and taking all things into consideration, who would not much rather choose to be Lazarus with his hard fortune in this world, and everlasting consolation in the other; than the rich man drowned in pleasure in this world, and tormented in flames in the other?—I say, the firm belief of another life, does not only answer this objection against the Divine providence; but does likewise minister abundant comfort and matter of joy to good men, under all their fears and troubles

in this world. Nay, this consideration alone, of a blessed immortality in another world, of which only the Christian religion hath given us full and undoubted assurance, is of that weight and moment, as to contribute more to the support of our spirits under the evils and calamities of this life, than all the considerations of philosophy put together. They are many of them pleasant and pretty, and fit enough to entertain and divert a man's mind under a slight trouble; but they are too speculative and refined for common capacities, too thin and weak to bear any great stress, and to support and relieve a man's mind under a sore and heavy affliction: but this is a consideration which hath strength and substance in it, that all things will end in our unspeakable happiness, and that this happiness shall have no end. This the apostle St. Paul speaks of as a proper consideration of comfort, of which we are assured by the Christian religion, that all the evils of this life shall, in the last issue and result of things, co-operate to our happiness: (Rom. viii. 28.) "We know (says he) that all things work together for good to them that love God." And, (2 Cor. iv. 16—18.) "For which cause we faint not," &c. The apostle gives us an account how they were afflicted and persecuted, and what it was that supported them under all their sufferings: (ver. 8—11.) "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake." And then he tells us what it was kept up the spirits

of Christians under these sharp sufferings, viz. the assurance which the Christian religion gives us of a resurrection to a better and happier life: (ver. 14.) "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise us up also by Jesus." And then it follows, (ver. 16.) "For which cause we faint not: but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day;" that is, though our bodies be wasted and weakened, yet every day we grow stronger in the resolution of our minds, because "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." And then at the beginning of the next chapter, he still urgeth the same consideration of comfort, that so soon as we pass out of the troubles of this life, we shall enter upon the happiness of the other. "For we know," that is, we Christians are assured, "that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Here you see is the great ground of their confidence and comfort in the worst condition, and under the most grievous persecutions which they were continually exposed to.

And therefore our Saviour and his apostles make no scruple to pronounce those persons blessed, who in respect of their sufferings seemed to be of all men in the world the most miserable; and they pronounce them happy, upon this very account of their sufferings. (Matt. v. 10—12.) "Blessed are they (says our Saviour) which are persecuted for

righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven." Great sufferings for God in this world, do entitle us, by virtue of this gracious promise of our Lord, to a glorious reward in the other. So likewise St. James exhorts Christians to rejoice in their sufferings: (James i. 2.) "My brethren, account it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." And, (chap. v. 11.) "Behold, (says he) we count them happy which endure." And St. Peter to the same purpose, (1 Pet. iv. 14.) "If ye be persecuted for righteousness' sake, happy are ye." So solid a comfort to men under all the troubles and afflictions of this world, is that firm assurance which the Christian religion gives us of a future happiness, as to bring even the greatest miseries which in this life we are liable to, in some sense, under the notion of blessedness.

And this was not only fine talk, like the glorious brags of the stoics; but the primitive Christians, in infinite examples, gave the real proof and evidence of it, in their constant and cheerful behaviour under the most cruel and intolerable torments. *Non magna loquimur, sed vivimus*, says Tertullian, in the name of the Christians: "We do not talk great things, but do them; and demonstrate the real effect of our words and profession in our lives and actions." Never did the arguments fetched from another world, and the assurance of a blessed immortality, display their force and virtue more, than in the joyful sufferings of the first Christians, and their generous contempt of all that was dear to

them in this world, "in hope of that eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised;" and which the Son of God hath insured to them, by his resurrection from the dead.

II. The Christian religion promiseth to every sincere Christian, the inward assistance and support and comfort of God's Holy Spirit, to bear up the weakness of human nature under its heaviest pressures of fear or sufferings. And this is peculiar to the Christian religion: for though the providence of God did take particular care of good men in all ages, and he did always in some good measure assist them to do their duty, and afford comfort and support to them under great trials and sufferings; yet God never made so express and general a promise of this to all good men, as he hath done by the Christian religion. Never was so constant a presence and influence of the Divine Spirit vouchsafed and assured to men under any dispensation, as that of the gospel; wherein the Spirit of God is promised to all that sincerely embrace the Christian religion, to reside and dwell in them, not only to all the purposes of sanctification and holiness, but of support and comfort under all troubles and sufferings; for which reason the gospel is called "the ministration of the Spirit," and is upon this account said to be "more glorious" than any other revelation which God had ever made to mankind. And therefore this is said to be essential to every Christian, to have the Spirit of God dwell in him. (Rom. viii. 9, 10.) Speaking of all true Christians, "Ye are (saith St. Paul) not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." So that every sincere Christian

"is made partaker of the promise of the Spirit through faith;" that is, by his belief of the Christian religion, he is under the immediate conduct and influence of God's Holy Spirit, and hath this blessed Guide and Comforter always present with him, nay, continually dwelling and residing in him, if we do not grieve and quench and drive him away from us by our ill treatment of him, and resistance of his blessed motions.

And this promise of the Spirit, our Saviour had a very particular respect to, when he prescribes faith in himself as a special remedy against that trouble which possessed their minds, upon the apprehension of his departure from them; and therefore he tells them so often, that when he was gone from them, he would send them another Comforter or Advocate, who should undertake their cause, and would stand by them in their greatest troubles and temptations. He tells them, that he himself would be an advocate for them in heaven: but because that was at a great distance, and might not be so sensible a comfort to them, he promiseth to send them another Advocate, that should be present with them here on earth, and upon all occasions undertake their patronage and defence. So that, all things considered, he assures them there was so little reason to be troubled at his departure from them, that they had cause rather to be glad of it, because it would turn to their great advantage; and instead of the benefit of his outward teaching and presence, they should have the inward presence and teaching of his Spirit, and the continual aids and supports of his grace. "I go my way, (says he, John xvi. 5—7.)—I go my way to him that sent me, and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? but

because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you, that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart, I will send him unto you." And so the evangelist tells us before, (chap. vii. 39.) that the Spirit was not to be given, till Jesus was first glorified. "This (says he) spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified;" plainly declaring, that according to the wise dispensation of God, it was so ordered, that the sending of the Holy Ghost for the propagating of the gospel, by those miraculous powers which were to be conferred upon the first publishers of it, and for the supporting and comforting of Christians under the sharp trials and sufferings to which they were to be exposed, was the fruit of "Christ's ascension into heaven," and "his sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high," and the first boon which he should obtain of his Father, by the virtue and power of his intercession. "I will pray the Father," says he, (ver. 16. of this chapter) "and he shall send you another Advocate, the Spirit of truth, and he shall abide with you for ever." "He shall send you another Comforter;" so our translation renders the word παράκλητος, but it most properly signifies "an Advocate, or Patron," that undertakes our defence and pleads our cause for us. And this the Holy Ghost in a most eminent and remarkable manner was to the apostles and first Christians, when they were called to answer for themselves before kings and governors. They were generally men of low condition and mean breeding, easily dashed out of

countenance before great men; and therefore our Saviour promised that the Holy Ghost should be their Advocate, and should prompt and assist them in the pleading of their cause. (Matt. x. 18, 19.) "Ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake; but when they deliver you up, take no thought how, or what you shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak: for it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." Or, as it is in St. Luke, (chap. xii. ver. 12.) "The Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say." And yet more fully, (chap. xxi. ver. 12—15.) where, speaking again of their being brought before kings and rulers for his name's sake, he gives them this charge, "Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist."

And this promise we find remarkably made good to St. Stephen, (Acts vi. 10.) of whom it is there said, that "his enemies were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake." And to St. Paul likewise, when he was first called to answer for himself at Rome, as he himself tells Timothy; (2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.) "At my first answer, no man stood with me; but all men forsook me: notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me."

And though this was extraordinary, yet all Christians have, by virtue of this promise, the ordinary assistance and comfort of God's Holy Spirit in all their troubles and afflictions. By this Spirit we may in all our distresses with confidence make our ad-

dresses to God, "having access by one Spirit to the Father," as St. Paul speaks, (Ephes. ii. 18.) By the same Spirit we are assisted in our prayers, and directed many times what to ask of God, suitable to the condition which his providence designs to bring us into; which seems to be the apostle's meaning: (Rom. viii. 26.) "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what to pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us;" that is, suggests to us such requests, as are fit for us to put up to God. By the same Spirit is secretly infused into our souls "peace and joy in believing, great consolation and good hope through grace." Hence are those expressions in Scripture of "the consolation of the Spirit," and of "joy in the Holy Ghost," the best cordial in the world in all cases of trouble.

And in extraordinary cases, good men, by virtue of this promise of the Spirit, may expect to be borne up and comforted in a very extraordinary and supernatural manner, under the greatest tribulations and sufferings "for righteousness' sake." This was very signal and remarkable in the primitive Christians, who were exposed to the most fierce and cruel persecutions; and may still be expected in like cases of extraordinary suffering for the testimony of God's truth. "If ye be reproached (saith St. Peter, 1 Pet. iv. 14.) for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." The Spirit of God is there promised, to strengthen and support all that suffer for the name of Christ, in a very conspicuous and glorious manner; according to that prayer of St. Paul, (Col. i. 11.) that Christians might be "strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, unto

all long-suffering with joyfulness." For when God exerciseth good men with trials more than human, and sufferings which are beyond the ordinary rate of human strength and patience to bear, he hath engaged himself to assist and endow them with more than human courage and resolution. So St. Paul tells the Corinthians, who had not yet felt the utmost rage of persecution, (1 Cor. x. 13.) "No temptation (or trial) hath yet befallen you, but what is common to men;" nothing but what is frequently incident to human nature, and what, by an ordinary assistance of God's grace, men may grapple with; but in case God calls men to extraordinary sufferings, "He is faithful that hath promised, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." And why should we be daunted at the weight of an affliction, if we be well assured that our strength shall be increased in proportion to our burden?

And wherever this promise is not made good there is some defect on our part; either men are not sincere in the profession of the truth, and then no wonder if they fall for fear of suffering; or they have been too confident of themselves, and have not, with that earnestness and importunity they ought, prayed to God for his grace and assistance, and thereupon God hath justly left them to try their strength against a violent and powerful temptation: as he did Peter, who, for all his confidence, did upon no very great temptation deny his Saviour; but even in this case, where there is truth and sincerity at the bottom, God gives to such persons, as he did to Peter, the opportunity of recovering themselves by repentance.

There are three particulars more remain; but I shall proceed no farther at this time.

SERMON CCXVI.

THE TRUE REMEDY AGAINST THE TROUBLES OF LIFE.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.—JOHN xiv. 1.

FROM these words I proposed to shew, what force and virtue there are in the remedy proposed by our Saviour, to mitigate and allay our troubles; and I told you, that our Saviour here prescribes a double remedy.

First, Faith in God, the great Creator and Governor of the world.

Secondly, Faith in himself, the Son of God and Saviour of men. I have spoken to the first, and have likewise entered upon the

Second, And here I propounded to shew, what farther considerations of comfort and support, faith in Christ, and the firm belief of the Christian religion, do afford to good men, for the allaying and mitigating of their greatest fears and troubles.

And I mentioned five:

I. Faith in Christ gives us full assurance of immortality, and the rewards of another world.

II. It promiseth to every sincere Christian the inward assistance and support of God's Holy Spirit. Thus far I have gone. I now proceed:

III. It assures us of the special efficacy of our prayers with God, either for our deliverance from trouble, or for the aids and supports of his grace under it.

Now concerning the great efficacy of our prayers with God, there are several very particular and remarkable promises and declarations in the New Testament: (Matt. vii. 7.) "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Matt. xxi. 22.) "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (John xv. 7.) "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." But then he directs us to put up our petitions to God in his name, as the way to make them prevalent: (John xiv. 13, 14.) "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." And (chap. xvi. 23, 24.) he repeats this promise again for their support and comfort under the tribulations which they should endure. "And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." And, again, (ver. 26, 27.) "At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you." He assures them of God's merciful inclination towards them; and if it would add any thing to their comfortable assurance of having their prayers heard, he could have told them, "that he would pray the Father for them." St. James particularly comforts the Christians under their trials upon this consideration, that God is ready to give wisdom and strength to demean ourselves as we ought under sufferings, if we heartily beg it of him: (James i. 2—5.) "My brethren,

count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience: but let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." And since this requires great wisdom, to bear great afflictions with patience, therefore he adds, that God is always ready to grant this wisdom and grace to those that heartily beg it of him. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (1 John iii. 22.) "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight." And, (chap. v. 14, 15.) "And this is the confidence that we have in him," that is, we Christians: for he had said before, "These things have I written unto you, that believe on the name of the Son of God;" and then it follows, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him;" that is, though we have not presently the thing we prayed for, yet we are as sure of it as if we had it. The earnest prayer of every sincere Christian, is very powerful and available with God. So St. James assures us: (chap. v. 16.) "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much:" much more the united prayers of the faithful. So our Saviour declares, (Matt. xviii. 19.) "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching the thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

All these promises and declarations do certainly signify a more special efficacy and prevalency of the

prayers of Christians. And though there was a miraculous power of prayer in the primitive times, which is now ceased, and of which St. James plainly speaks, (chap. v. 14, 15.) "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up:" yet it is certain that these promises extend farther, to the efficacy of the prayers of the faithful in such cases. And so our Saviour extends this promise; (Matt. xxi. 22.) for after he had said in the verse before, "Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done unto the fig-tree; but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done:" after this he immediately subjoins, "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Hereby declaring, that the efficacy of the prayers of Christians was not limited only to those miraculous effects which were but to continue for a time, but that this promise was to be extended to the prayers of the faithful in all cases, and all times.

And, indeed, all the grounds and reasons of the efficacy and prevalency of our prayers, which are mentioned in the New Testament, do equally concern Christians in all times; as that we pray to God in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ, upon which our Saviour very frequently, when he makes this promise, lays great stress, and seems to render it as the reason of the special efficacy of our prayers. (John xiv. 13, 14.) "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my

name, I will do it." And, (chap. xvi. 23, 24.) "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Heretofore ye have asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive."

Another reason of the acceptance and prevalency of our prayers, is, that the Spirit of God which dwells in all true Christians does help our weakness, and secretly directs us to ask of God those things which are according to his will, and does, as it were, intercede for us. (Rom. viii. 26.) "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities. For we know not what we shall pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us." And, (ver. 27.) "And he that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God." And no wonder if those petitions are very prevalent, which we are assisted and directed to put up to God, according to his will.

And this certainly is a great comfort under any trouble, that we can have free access to God by prayer, in confidence that he will grant us those requests which we put up to him according to his will. And this the apostle to the Hebrews mentions more than once, as an argument to them to continue steadfast in the profession of their religion, notwithstanding the persecution that attended it, because we may at all times address ourselves to God in confidence of his gracious help and assistance, (Heb. iv. 16.) After he had exhorted them "to hold fast their profession," as an encouragement thereto, he adds the free access we may have to God for his help and support: "Let us, therefore, (says he) come boldly (or with great freedom and confidence) to the throne

of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find favour with him for our seasonable help and succour." And to the same purpose, (chap. x. 19, 20.) "Having, therefore, freedom to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, (that is, having access to God in prayer, by Jesus Christ;) let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith;" that is, in perfect confidence that our prayers will be graciously heard and answered; upon which he adds, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that hath promised:" if we continue steadfast to God, and the profession of his truth, he will make good all that he hath promised, both of present support under our sufferings, and of the glorious reward of them in another life: he will hear our prayers, and grant us the aids and supplies of his grace as we stand in need of them.

IV. The Christian religion propounds to us the best and most admirable pattern that ever was of patience and constancy of mind, under the apprehension of approaching evils, or the sense of our present sufferings, and of a contented and cheerful submission to the will of God, in the saddest condition to which human nature is incident; and that is the pattern of our blessed Saviour, who, for this reason among others, was so great a sufferer in so many kinds, that he might go before us in this rough and difficult way, and "leave us an example, that we should follow his steps;" that we might learn from him how to calm and quiet our spirits, to appease and hush the tumults of our passions, under the severest dispensations of God's providence towards us, and to bend our wills to a patient submission to the will of our heavenly Father, under the sorest afflictions and sharpest sufferings. For though

our blessed Saviour prayed so earnestly to his Father, that "that bitter cup might pass from him," yet how quietly and cheerfully did he resign and yield up himself to the will of God, saying, "Yet not my will, but thine be done!" Human nature shrunk and gave back at the sight of his dreadful sufferings: but his reason overruled the inclinations of nature, and kept him to a steady resolution of submitting to the will of God. And therefore, when Peter attempted his rescue, he commanded him to desist, saying, "Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given, shall I not drink it?" (John xviii. 11.) And though he had as quick a sense of suffering as any man, yet with what patience did he possess his soul! with what meekness and humility of spirit did he bear and yield to it! "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before the shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not: but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." And thus "it became the Captain of our salvation," that he might be a perfect pattern to us of patience and submission to the will of God, of a meek and undisturbed mind, under the greatest bodily pains, and the extreme anguish of his soul, "to be made perfect by sufferings."

So that under the greatest present evils, or the most fearful apprehension of future evil and suffering, we should fix our eye steadfastly upon this great and glorious example of patience and constancy and meekness, of a due sense, and yet of a most decent behaviour under the heaviest load of affliction, that ever was laid upon any of the sons of men; looking, as the apostle exhorts, (Heb. xii. 2, 3.) "Look-

ing unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame; and considering him, who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be weary and faint in our minds."

And surely if we would but let our minds dwell awhile upon this consideration of the sufferings of the Son of God, and his great meekness and patience, and submission to the will of God under them, it would mightily conduce to the mitigating of our trouble, and bringing us to "possess our souls in patience," in the saddest condition that can befal us.

And what consideration more proper for us than this, when we are going to receive the blessed sacrament, wherein the sufferings of the Son of God are represented to us, in the symbols of his body broken, and his blood shed for the remission of our sins; and there are many considerations which this sight is apt to suggest to us, which are so many powerful arguments to quiet and comfort our minds under the greatest troubles and sufferings which we are liable to; such as these.

1. The grievous sufferings which the Son of God was exposed to, do clearly shew us, that the good things of this life are not so valuable, nor the evils and sufferings of it so considerable, as we are apt to fancy and imagine; when the best man that ever lived was so destitute of the common comforts and conveniences of human life, and had so large a share of the calamities and sufferings of it. If we could but rectify our opinion of things, it would go a great way in making any of the evils and afflictions of this life tolerable. If God see good to reduce us to poverty and want, let us think of him, who, "being Lord of all, had not where to lay his head;" who

"being rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." To be destitute of worldly accommodations cannot seem so dismal and despicable a sight, when we consider whose lot it was to live in a low and indigent condition; the very consideration whereof doth not only make poverty tolerable, but even glorious.

So likewise when we are "persecuted for righteousness' sake," and exercised with sufferings and reproaches; when we are ready to be discouraged in well-doing by the opposition we meet withal from the ingratitude of men, and the malicious interpretation of our good actions, perverting the best things, done with the best mind and to the best end, to some ill purpose and design; let us "look to Jesus," and "consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself," and this will help to abate the hideous apprehension of these things.

2. The sufferings of the Son of God are a demonstration to us, that the love and favour of God, wherein the chief happiness of man consists, are not to be estimated and measured by outward prosperity in this world; much less can it be concluded from temporal afflictions and sufferings, that God hath no favour and kindness for those whom he thinks fit to exercise with them. For we see plainly by this instance of the grievous sufferings of his Son, that God may most deeply wound and afflict those whom he most dearly loves; and if we can be secure of the favour of God, and his loving-kindness, why should our hearts be troubled and dismayed at the apprehension of any evil that can befal us?

God may love his children, and yet chasten them very severely: nay, that he does so, is rather an argument that they are his children, and that he

loves them, and is concerned for them. So I am sure the apostle teacheth us to argue, (Heb. xii. 6—8.) "For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." The heaviest and most grievous load of sufferings that was ever laid on any man, God permitted to be laid "on his only-begotten Son, the dearly beloved of his soul, in whom he was well-pleased." The greater our afflictions are, and the more we suffer for "righteousness' sake," so much the liker are we to the Son of God, and so much the more likely to be the sons and children of God. It is true, as the apostle tells us, that "no affliction for the present is joyous, but grievous:" but surely it is a great mitigation of it, to consider what a glorious example and argument of patience our religion proposeth to us, for our encouragement under sufferings: that the best man that ever was lived in the most afflicted condition; and the greatest sufferer that ever was, or can be, was "the dearly-beloved Son of God."

3. In the victorious sufferings of the Son of God, we see the world conquered to our hands, all the terrors and temptations of it disarmed, and all its force baffled and broken. This consideration our Saviour makes use of to support the faint spirits of his disciples, under the melancholy apprehensions which they had of sufferings: (John xvi. 33.) "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." The great work is done to our hands; affliction and death are van-

quished and overcome by him. That conquest which "the Captain of our salvation" hath already made of all "the powers of darkness," renders our victory over them cheap and easy.

4. The temptations and sufferings of our Lord were greater than ours are or can be; for he bore the heavy and insupportable load of all the sins of all mankind, and of the wrath and vengeance due to them. "The Lord hath laid on him," saith the prophet, (Isa. liii. 6, 7.) "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all; he was oppressed and afflicted." And well might he be oppressed with affliction, who had such an intolerable burden as the sins of all mankind to press him down. That passage is commonly applied to him, and well might he cry out in that manner, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." Such were the sufferings of our Lord, so great and so grievous, as none of us are in any degree able to undergo. That weight under which he crouched, would crush us; that which he was hardly able to sustain, would certainly sink us; and do we complain and "faint in our minds," when but a very little part of the punishment due to us only for our own sins is inflicted upon us? The consideration of the heavy and "unknown sufferings of the Son of God," should make all our afflictions not only tolerable, but light.

5. And yet we have in effect the same support that he had. We are apt to be very much disheartened and discouraged at the apprehension of sufferings, from the consideration of our own weakness and frailty; "but the Spirit of Christ dwells in us," and the same "glorious power that raised up Jesus

from the dead, works mightily on them that believe." St. Paul useth very high expressions in this matter: (Ephes. i. 29, 30.) "That ye may know," says he, speaking in general of all Christians, "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him on his own right hand." So that every sincere Christian is endowed with a kind of omnipotency, being able, as St. Paul says of himself, "to do all things through Christ strengthening him." We are of ourselves very weak, and the temptations and terrors of the world are very powerful; but there is a principle residing in every true Christian, that is able to bear us up against the world and the power of all its temptations. "Whatsoever is born of God (says St. John), overcometh the world: for greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." The Holy Spirit of God which dwells in all true Christians, is a more powerful principle of resolution and courage and patience, under the sharpest trials and sufferings, than that evil spirit which rules in the world is to stir up and set on the malice and rage of the world against us. "Ye are of God, and have overcome the world: for greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

6. Let us consider farther, for whom and for what our blessed Lord suffered. Not for himself; but for our sake: not for any fault of his own; for "he had no sin;" but for our sins. He was perfectly innocent: but we are great and grievous offenders. We suffer upon our own account: but he only for our sakes, and for our salvation. So that the example of our Lord's sufferings hath an

irresistible force and virtue in it, to argue us into patience and submission. Did he bear the load of our sins so willingly? did he "who had no sin" suffer so patiently, to free us from eternal sufferings? And shall we who are guilty think much to bear a small part of that burden, which he so cheerfully underwent for us, and which falls so much short of the due punishment of our faults? The penitent thief upon the cross urged the equity and force of this argument to patience, to his fellow-criminal, that they who had been guilty of such great crimes, and were justly condemned for them, ought to be patient under their sufferings. "We indeed, (says he) are justly condemned; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss."

7. And lastly, If we consider the transcendent excellency and dignity of the person, who underwent so great sufferings with so much meekness and patience, and with so even and undisturbed a mind, this will calm and allay our passions, and mitigate the troubles which befal us pitiful and inconsiderable creatures, in comparison of this "Prince of glory" and "heir of everlasting bliss." When we consider the meekness of this excellent person, the eternal Son of God, and with what submission and serenity of mind he demeaned himself under so great and continual provocations from his own creatures and beneficiaries, those whom he had made, and whom he came to save; shall we think much to bear the indignities and affronts of our fellow-creatures? When we behold how contented this great person was in the meanest condition, how he welcomed all events, and was so perfectly resigned to the will of his heavenly Father, that what-

soever pleased God, pleased him; shall we murmur at any condition which the providence of God allots to us, and repine at any event whatsoever?

Shall we resent injuries and affronts and calumnies so heinously as to be out of all temper and patience, when we consider with what meekness of temper, and how little emotion of mind, the Son of God bore all these? how "he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; and withheld not his face from shame and spitting;" how "he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth; being reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not?"

To conclude, can we entertain thoughts of revenge towards the instruments of our sufferings, when we have such a pattern of forgiving before us, who poured out his blood for the expiation of the guilt of them that shed it, and spent his last breath in a most fervent and charitable prayer for his betrayers and murderers?

Thus we should propose to ourselves the pattern of our Lord's spirit and demeanour under sufferings, in whom meekness and submission and patience had their perfect work; that the same mind may be in us that was in Christ Jesus, and that as we have him for an example, we may follow his steps.

The last consideration of comfort and support under trouble, which the Christian religion gives us, remains yet to be spoken to, namely, that we are assured of a most compassionate and prevalent and perpetual patron and advocate and intercessor with God for us.

But this, together with the application of this whole discourse, I shall refer to the next opportunity.

SERMON CCXVII.

THE TRUE REMEDY AGAINST THE TROUBLES OF LIFE.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.—JOHN xiv. 1.

I COME now to the fifth and last ground of comfort, which the Christian religion affords to good men, for their support under trouble, namely, That it assures us of a most compassionate and prevalent and perpetual patron and advocate and intercessor with God in heaven for us, namely, our blessed Saviour, "who for the suffering of death was crowned with glory and honour," advanced "at the right hand of God," where "he sits in great majesty and glory," having "all power in heaven and earth committed to him," and where "he lives continually to make intercession for us."

And this is another consideration mentioned by our Saviour for the comfort of his disciples, who were so sorrowful at the thoughts of his departure from them, that though he should leave the world, yet he should be highly advanced in heaven, where he would certainly employ all his favour and power and interest for their benefit and advantage, and be an everlasting patron and advocate for those whose salvation he had purchased with so much sweat and blood, presenting our requests and prayers to God, in virtue of his most meritorious sacrifice and sufferings continually presented to his Father, perpetually

soliciting our cause, and procuring for us all those blessings by his intercession in heaven, which he had purchased for us by his blood upon earth. "For which reason," saith the apostle, (Heb. vii. 25.) "he is able to save to the utmost all those that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us;" that is, he is able to perfect the work of our salvation, which he began here upon earth; and to procure for all those who address their prayers to God in his name, whatever is needful and convenient for us, because he is always at the right hand of God to second our prayers by his powerful intercession for us.

And this is a ground of comfort, though not greater and more substantial in itself than the other; yet more accommodated to our apprehensions, who are naturally apt to dread the majesty of God, and to seek out for some in favour with him, to be mediators and intercessors with God for us, and to present our prayers and requests to him. And this was the original of the addresses of the heathens to the angels and souls departed, as a kind of intermediate and inferior deities, to present their prayers, and intercede with the great God in their behalf. And as in compliance with the general apprehension of mankind concerning the appeasing of the Deity by all sorts of sacrifices, God was pleased to provide "one sacrifice," which "by being once offered" should "obtain eternal redemption for us, and perfect for ever them that are sanctified;" and by this means to put an end both to the carnal sacrifices of the law, and the barbarous and inhuman sacrifices of the pagan worship: so, in like condescension to the general inclinations of mankind to address themselves to God by several mediators

and intercessors, God hath appointed "one only mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all;" thereby to put an end to that infinite superstition, which had obtained in the world for so many ages, of addressing their prayers to God by the mediation of good angels, and the departed souls of their heroes and great men, who were, as I may so call them, the pagan saints.

So that, as under the gospel, God hath appointed but "one sacrifice for sin," that should be of eternal efficacy: so but one mediator in heaven for sinners to offer up our prayers to God, and to intercede continually for us, in the power and virtue of that one sacrifice, once offered for the redemption of mankind. And therefore, it is every whit as contrary to the genius and design of the Christian religion, to apply ourselves to other intercessors with God in heaven for us, whether saints or angels, or even the blessed Virgin herself, as it would be to continue still the Jewish sacrifices, not to say the heathen. For, it is not clearer that there is but one proper sacrifice under the gospel, viz. that of Christ upon the cross; than that there is but "one mediator and intercessor with God in heaven for us." Nay, St. Paul speaks as if the Christian religion did no more admit of more mediators than one, than of more Gods than one: (1 Tim. ii. 5.) "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." Nor is the force of this plain text to be avoided, by saying that the apostle here speaks of "a mediator of redemption," as appears from the following words, "who gave himself a ransom for all." For it is plain likewise, that he speaks also of "a media-

tor of intercession," and affirms him to be "but one," as is evident from what goes before. The apostle directs "prayers and supplications to be made for all men," and then at the fifth verse, to whom Christians should address these prayers, and by whose mediation, viz. to God, in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ. "For (says he) there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." So that the apostle's discourse does as plainly infer, that there is but "one mediator of intercession," as that there is but "one mediator of redemption."

And, indeed, whosoever considers that quite throughout the New Testament, our Saviour and his apostles do constantly direct Christians to make their prayers to God in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ, and no where give so much as the least intimation of applying ourselves to any other intercessors with God in heaven for us, may justly wonder how this superstition of praying to angels and saints departed, which hath no manner of countenance, and is by necessary consequence so clearly forbidden, should ever prevail among Christians; especially since it is a plain diminution of the virtue and efficacy of our Saviour's intercession, or if it add nothing to it, it is perfectly vain and endless, and to no purpose. For what need of any other intercessors with God in heaven for us, if that be true which the apostle to the Hebrews most expressly affirms, that "Christ is able to save them to the utmost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The prevalency and efficacy whereof may justly minister to us, in all our distresses and troubles, some peculiar ground of comfort above what springs

from the bare contemplation of the Divine nature, that we have so powerful a friend to intercede with God for us, one so dearly beloved of him, and so highly in his favour; one that is advanced "far above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come;" and consequently able to do more for us, than all the blessed saints and angels in heaven, and more than all the powers of darkness can do against us.

And this is matter of great comfort to us upon these three considerations:

1. That our advocate is nearly related to us, having condescended, by assuming our nature, to be allied to us, to become "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," so that we may address ourselves to him with great freedom and confidence; and, as the apostle expresseth it, (Heb. iv. 16.) "We may come with boldness to this throne of grace, for seasonable mercy and help in time of need." For we may most assuredly believe, that he who stooped to be made man, and to become one of us, will upon all occasions most heartily be concerned for us, and ready to help us.

2. Considering that he hath already given the greatest demonstration of his kindness and compassion to us; we may be sure that he, who hath done and suffered such things for our sakes, hath a very tender love and affection for us; he who was contented to die for us, will do for us any thing else that may do us good.

3. And that we might have no doubt of his forwardness and inclination to pity and relieve us, he suffered the most grievous things himself that any man could suffer, that from the experience and re-

membrance of his own sufferings, he might learn to compassionate us. And this the apostle particularly insists upon, as a very comfortable consideration to us in all our trials and sufferings. (Heb. iv. 15, 16.) "For we have not a high-priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are; yet without sin. Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need:" and, (chap. ii. 17, 18.) "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest: for in that he himself suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." So that we may rest assured of his pity and support in all our afflictions and trials, who knows both the infirmity of our nature, and hath himself had experience of greater sufferings than any of us either shall or can ever be exercised withal.

And as for the general concernment of his truth, and religion, and church upon earth, that which all good men are with so much reason solicitous about, this is his proper care, and the great business that he is intent upon, now that he is in heaven, to protect and defend his truth and religion, and the church which professeth it, so that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." This is his kingdom, for the effectual administration whereof "all power in heaven and in earth is committed to him." And, as he intercedeth with his Father for every particular Christian, so much more for his church, which is his body; to preserve her from all dangers that threaten her ruin, and to guard her against the power and malice of all her enemies. For to this end was

he advanced to the right hand of God, that he might continue there, "till he had made his enemies his footstool." And this kingdom of his shall continue in his hands, "till he have put down all rule, and all authority and power," that sets itself against him; "for he must reign till he have put all things under his feet."

So that, though truth may be obscured and clouded for a time, and the professors of it grievously harased and op pressed, yet it shall not finally be borne down, but shall at length prevail against all opposition; because, he who hath undertaken the protection of it is mighty, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, the chief favourite of heaven, who is continually "at the right hand of God," and "lives for to make intercession for us."

And thus I have, as briefly as I well could, represented to you, what force and virtue there are in the two remedies here prescribed by our Saviour, for the mitigating and allaying of our troubles: viz. faith in God, the great Creator and Governor of the world; and faith likewise in himself, the Son of God and Saviour of men. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

And now to apply this discourse to ourselves; the inferences I shall make from it shall be these three:

I. That in all our troubles and adversities, of what kind soever, we should support and comfort ourselves with the firm belief of the providence of Almighty God, and of his tender and compassionate care of mankind, especially of those that fear him, and put their trust in his mercy.

II. We should put a high value upon the Christ-

ian religion, and "hold fast the profession of it without wavering;" which affords us such firm and solid grounds of comfort and support under all troubles and afflictions, as are no where else to be found; such as neither the light of nature, nor any other revelation that God ever made of himself to mankind, do give us the notice and knowledge of.

III. Since the prayers of Christ are so effectual and prevalent with God, let us, by frequent and fervent prayers, make our requests known to God; and let us, "with confidence and full assurance of faith, address ourselves to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find favour with him for our seasonable help and support in the time of need." I shall speak briefly to these, and so conclude this discourse.

I. In all troubles and adversities, of what kind soever, under all afflictions and sufferings that may befal us, of loss or pain, of poverty and sickness, of reproach and persecution for righteousness' sake, and under the most fearful apprehensions of danger and distress, to all human appearance inevitably threatening us in our persons and private concernments, or with relation to the public peace and tranquillity, or to that which ought to be infinitely dearer to us than all these, our religion, which is the great concernment of our souls, and of all eternity, when we have no hope any where else, no visible means of help and redress, when we are almost in despair of avoiding the danger, and warding off the blow that is made at us, when ruin and destruction seem just to have overtaken us, and are ready to devour us with open mouth, and "to swallow us up quick;" in a word, when we are reduced to the

greatest extremity and distress that can be imagined—even in this case, if ever it should happen, we should support our minds with a firm belief of the providence of Almighty God, and of his tender and compassionate care of mankind, especially of "those that fear him, and put their trust in his mercy;" and comfort ourselves, as the holy and divine Psalmist does, in all our fears and troubles; "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee;" (Psal. lvi. 3.) And he tells us that every good man hath ground and reason for this confidence; (Psal. cxii. 7, 8.) speaking of the righteous and good man, "He shall not (says he) be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid." And, (Psal. xxvii. 1.) "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psal. lxii. 5—8.) "My soul, wait thou only upon God: for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence, I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God. Trust in him at all times, ye people, pour out your heart before him. God is a refuge for us." And, (Psal. xlvi. 1, 2. 7.) "God is our refuge and strength; and a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed; and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." To which I will add that comfortable promise, (Isa. xxvi. 3.) "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee."

Thus we may, in all conditions that may befal us,

in our greatest fears and troubles, ease our hearts, by reposing ourselves upon God, in confidence of his support and deliverance, of his care and providence, to prevent and divert the evils we fear; or of his gracious help to bear us up under them, and of his mercy and goodness to deliver us out of them, when he sees it best; provided always that we be careful of our duty to him, and do what becomes us, and nothing else.

For our more particular direction herein,

1. Let us depend upon God, and entirely confide in his goodness and care, and trust in his wisdom and power for our protection and deliverance: for here is our great security. In all our difficulties and troubles, the providence of God is infinitely more to us, than any prudence and conduct of our own. He hath a thousand ways to divert and put by the evils which are levelled against us, "to turn the counsels of men backward, and make their devices of none effect." When we can do nothing to help and save ourselves, "his right hand, and his arm, and the light of his countenance," can do it, if "he have a favour for us."

2. Let us so trust God, as to neglect no prudent and lawful means for our security and preservation from evil. Let us not, by our rashness and folly, provoke trouble and danger, and bring them upon ourselves. Let us, according to our Saviour's counsel, "be wise as serpents," and "innocent as doves." Let us use all that care and prudence which are consistent with innocence and a good conscience; and when we have done that, let us be no farther solicitous, but resign up ourselves, and all our concernments, to the good pleasure of God, and the disposal of his wise providence; and leave

it to him, who made the world, to govern it, because he certainly understands it best.

3. Let us be sure to keep within the bounds of our duty, trying no unlawful ways for our ease and preservation, and rescue from the evils which we fear and lie under; by loosening the bonds of subjection and obedience to authority, or by any other sinister and indirect means. For let us assure ourselves, that God is never more concerned to appear for us, than when out of conscience of our duty to him, we are contented rather to suffer, than work our deliverance by undue means. Let us "commit ourselves to him in well-doing," and do nothing, no, not for the cause of religion, which is contrary to the plain rules and precepts of it.

II. We should put a high value upon the Christian religion, and "hold fast the profession of it without wavering," which affords to us such firm and solid grounds of comfort and support under all troubles and afflictions, as are no where else to be found; such as neither the light of nature, nor any other revelation that God ever made of himself to mankind, do give us notice and knowledge of.

We should highly value the Christian religion, which hath "brought life and immortality to light," and hath made so clear a discovery to us of the glorious and eternal rewards of another world, for the encouragement of our faith, and support of our patience under the evils and pressures of this life; and which promiseth, and is ready to afford every sincere Christian, the precious aids and comforts of God's Holy Spirit, to sustain the weakness of human nature under the greatest tribulations and sufferings; and does likewise assure us of the special efficacy of our prayers with God; and sets before us the

best and most admirable pattern that ever was, of a contented and cheerful submission to the will of God in the saddest condition incident to human nature, and of perfect patience and composure of mind under the apprehension of approaching evils, and the sense of present sufferings; and, lastly, which assures us of a most compassionate and prevalent and perpetual patron and advocate and intercessor with God in heaven for us. All these are peculiar advantages of the Christian religion, and ought to be so many endearments of it to us, and engagements to "hold fast the profession of it." This builds our comfort and hope upon a rock, which will abide firm against all rains and winds and storms. And if we suffer ourselves to be removed from it, we quit the only foundation of all our comfort in this life, and happiness in the next. So that, if we would "hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of hope," firm unto the end, we must take heed, as the apostle to the Hebrews (chap. iii. 12.) cautions the Christians in his time; we must (I say) "take heed, lest there be in any of us an evil spirit of infidelity, to apostatize from the living God;" that is, to fall off from the profession of his truth and religion. A religion worthy of all men to be received and adhered to; because, as it calls us to sufferings, so it affords the greatest comforts and supports under them, as is evident from the cheerful and joyful behaviour of the primitive Christians and martyrs, under the greatest extremities of sufferings and torments, the like instances whereto of patience and constancy under so long and repeated persecutions, no other religion that ever was in the world is able to produce.

III. And lastly, Since the prayers of Christians

are so effectual and prevalent with God, let us, by frequent and fervent prayer "in every thing make our requests known to God; and let us with confidence and full assurance of faith address ourselves to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find favour with him for our seasonable help and support in time of need." Let us, as our Saviour exhorts his disciples, "watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation." And, as the apostle likewise exhorts, let us "be sober and vigilant, and watch unto prayer," taking all opportunities for it, and spending much time in this duty, than which none of all the duties enjoined by the Christian religion will turn to a better and more comfortable account, if our hearts and lives be but answerable to our prayers.

Let us earnestly beg of God, that his watchful and merciful providence would undertake the care of us; that he would fit and prepare us for every condition which he hath designed to bring us into; that he would teach us to demean ourselves in it as we ought; that he would consider our frailties, and "lay no greater load of affliction upon us, than he will give us grace and strength to bear;" that if he sees it good to exercise any of us with afflictions and sufferings in any kind, he would make us "able to stand in that evil day, and when we have done all to stand."

And if, instead of vain murmurings, and complaints, and terrifying ourselves with fears of what may never happen, we would, after the example of holy David, "betake ourselves to prayer," and by this means engage the providence of God for our protection from evil, or for our support under it; we should certainly do much better for ourselves, and

contribute much more, than we can do any other way, to the prevention of any evil that we can fear, or to the mitigating or shortening of it, as to God's infinite wisdom and goodness shall seem best.

And let us always be mindful of that caution which our Saviour gives to his disciples, that they might always be in a due preparation for the coming of our Lord to judgment; (Luke xxi. 34—36.) "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." This caution and counsel do proportionably hold, as to our preparation for any other evil day of affliction and suffering in this world; that we should beware of sensuality, and an inordinate love to the things of this world, and care about them; because these soften and effeminate our spirits, and render them unfit for the day of adversity: and that we should watch and pray; because these are the best preparations against an evil day, and perhaps may prevent it, at least as to ourselves, if God think it fit for us, and "count us worthy to escape it."

To conclude then this whole discourse. In all our fears and troubles, in all afflictions and adversities that may happen to us in this world, let us "encourage ourselves in the Lord our God, the Father of mercy, and the God of all consolation;" and in his blessed Son Jesus Christ our Lord, "the

high priest of our profession," and " the author and finisher of our faith ; whom God hath exalted far above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come, and hath given him to be head over all things to his church ;" remembering that we and all our concernments are in the hands of his providence, where we are infinitely safer than in any counsel and wisdom of our own. And if, after all, it be the will of God to exercise any of us with more than ordinary trials, " to lay affliction upon our loins," and " to suffer men to ride over our heads," as the Psalmist expresseth it, let us, as St. Peter exhorts, " commit the keeping of our souls to him in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator, who is able to keep that which is committed to him, and to preserve us to his heavenly kingdom;" which let us all humbly and earnestly beg, for the sake of Jesus Christ ; " To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, might, majesty, and dominion, now and for ever."

SERMON CCXVIII.

OF THE NATURE OF FAITH IN GENERAL.

But without faith it is impossible to please God.—HEB. xi. 6.

BEFORE I come to the words themselves, in order to our better understanding of them, we will take into consideration the design of this Epistle, that so we may see more clearly the relation that these words have to the foregoing discourse. Who the penman of this Epistle was, I shall not tell you, because I do not know, nor is it much material to know it; but whoever wrote it, he had this very good design in the writing of it, to persuade the Jews to hold fast the profession of the gospel, notwithstanding all the sufferings and persecutions it exposed them to. And to this purpose he shews, at large, what prerogatives the gospel had above the legal administration. "The law was given by the disposition of the angels, in the hand of a mediator," that is, Moses: but the gospel is revealed to us by the Son of God; a person, not only above Moses, who was a mere man; but above angels. The gospel is the substance and reality of the types and ceremonies, and the very good things themselves, that were obscurely represented by those shadows. It is "a testament established upon better promises," the clear promises of eternal life, which were but darkly revealed in the Old Testament, that being established either solely or prin-

cipally upon temporal promises; and it is a perfect and complete dispensation, that hath in it all things requisite to attain its end, and therefore shall never stand in need of any farther change or alteration. These are the heads of those arguments which the author of this Epistle does largely discourse upon.

Now the gospel having in these respects the advantage of the legal dispensation, the apostle doth all along in this Epistle earnestly exhort the Jews to a constant profession and steadfast belief of the gospel, and not to return back from Christianity to Judaism, which was a far less perfect institution: (chap. ii. 1.) "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip;" παραῤῥυῶμεν, "lest we should fall away," so the word may be rendered. And, (chap. iii. 12.) "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." And, (chap. iv. 1.) "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." And, (chap. x. 23.) "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering."

After which he declares the danger of apostacy, or falling off from the belief and profession of the gospel which they had entertained; (ver. 26.) "For if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." He tells them they would be shrewdly tempted to apostacy by the reproaches, afflictions, and persecutions, that they would meet withal: but the promises of the gospel were sufficient to support and bear up good men under these, if they

were but firmly persuaded of the truth of them; and though they did not for the present receive the things promised, yet a firm belief of them would carry them through all sufferings, and make them hold out under them. "The just shall live by faith," (ver. 38.)

And having mentioned the power of faith; that is, of a confident persuasion of the truth and reality of the promises of the gospel to support men under sufferings, he gives an account how faith uses to have this influence; (ver. 1.) "Faith is the substance of things hoped for;" so we render the word ὑπόστασις: but it might be much better rendered, both according to the frequent use of it in the Septuagint, and in the New Testament, "a confidence of things hoped for;" that is, a confident expectation of things hoped for, or a firm persuasion that our hopes will not be frustrated. And as this is more agreeable to the scope and design of the apostle, so likewise to the common acceptation of this word in the New Testament, for which I will appeal to two places: (2 Cor. ix. 4.) "that we be not put to shame in this confidence of boasting," ἐν τῇ ὑποστάσει ταύτῃ. The other text is in this Epistle, (chap. iii. 14.) "That we hold fast the beginning of our confidence," τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως, which is of the very same sense with παῤῥησία, at the sixth verse. "If we hold fast the confidence," παῤῥησίαν, "and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. And the evidence of things not seen," ἔλεγχος, "the conviction," as being convinced, or persuaded of the truth of those things, for which we have no ocular or sensible demonstration. Now if faith in the promises of the gospel do persuade us and give us satisfaction that we shall receive a reward, which

will outweigh and countervail our present sufferings, then faith is likely to support us under sufferings.

And, that this is no strange thing which the apostle speaks of faith, he shews that, in all ages, faith hath been the principle of all holy and heroic actions. "By it the elders obtained a good report;" it is that which made the holy men of the Old Testament so famous; and this he proves throughout this chapter, by a large induction of particular instances, in which we see the power of faith, the wonderful effects of it, and the mighty works it hath done in the world.

But because he had said before, that "faith is the evidence (or conviction) of things not seen," as well as a confident expectation of things hoped for, before he comes to instance in the effects of faith, upon particular persons in the Old Testament, he proves it to be "the evidence of things not seen," that is, being convinced and persuaded of things of which we have no sensible and ocular demonstration: (ver. 3.) "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear;" that is, though we were not present at the making of the world, nor did see it framed; yet we are satisfied, and do believe that it was made by the powerful word of God, and that all those things which we see, were not produced out of things which do now appear, but either immediately out of nothing, or a dark confused chaos.

And having thus proved that we may be persuaded of things we do not see, of things past or future, he comes to the particular instances of the holy men of the Old Testament, in whom the power

of faith did appear. He begins with Abel, who being persuaded of the being of God, and the perfection and excellency of the Divine nature, and consequently that he was worthy to be served with the best, by virtue of this faith "offered up to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." The second instance is in Enoch, who being persuaded of the being of God, and of his goodness to reward them that serve him, was a righteous man, and studious to please God; and as a reward of this faith and obedience, "God translated him, that he should not see death;" upon which the apostle assumes, (ver. 6.) "but without faith it is impossible to please God." As if he had said, Unless a man do believe, and be persuaded of some principles, it is impossible any man should be religious, or endeavour to do any thing that is pleasing or acceptable to God: for religion, and the service of God, and an endeavour to please him, do suppose at least that I believe and am persuaded of these two things—of the being, and of the goodness of God; that there is such a being as I serve and seek to please, and that his goodness is such, that it will not be in vain to serve him, he will not let me be a loser by it.

And that here, by pleasing, we are to understand in general, the performing any action of religion, is evident from the equivalent terms which are used in the next words; "For he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek him;" where coming to God, and seeking of him, are of the same importance with pleasing him. Now, to come to God, and seek him, in Scripture phrase, signify the sum of religion, it being usual in the language of the Scripture, to express the whole of religion by any eminent prin-

ciple, or part, or effect of it, as by the knowledge, remembrance, or fear of God, in the Old Testament; by the love of him, and faith in him, in the New, by coming to him, seeking him, calling upon his name, and pleasing of him.

Now, that coming to God, and seeking him, are of the same importance here with pleasing him, will be clear to any that consider the apostle's reasoning here in the text, which supposeth those to be the same, otherwise there would be no force in his argument. For the proposition which he proves, is, that "Without faith it is impossible to please God." The argument he useth is this, "If every one that comes to God must believe that he is," &c. then "without faith it is impossible to please him;" but "every one that comes to God must believe that he is." Now, unless coming to God, and seeking him, be the same thing with pleasing him, this would be no good argument; for there would be four terms in it; but if these phrases be made equivalent, then the argument is good. Thus, if "every one that comes to God," that is, that will please him, "must believe that he is," &c. then "without faith it is impossible to please him:" but "every one that comes to God," that is, that will please him, "must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," or that endeavour to please him; therefore "without faith it is impossible to please him."

Which proposition doth not only signify that faith is necessary to religion, and a condition without which it cannot be; but implies likewise, that it is a cause or principle of it; not only the foundation upon which all religion must be built; but the fountain from whence it springs. For this I take to

be implied in the words—not only that there can be no religion unless we believe a God; but supposing this truth firmly believed, that there is a God, it will have a great influence upon men to make them religious. For the apostle having before spoken of the power of faith upon Abel and Enoch, that it put them upon pleasing God, he assumes in the next words, "but without faith," &c. As if he had said, That ye may know what was the principle of their religion, of their holiness and obedience, let us imagine that a man should believe nothing concerning the being of a God, or the blessedness of those that serve him; what would be the issue? Why this, certainly—there would be no religion, no such thing as serving of God, or endeavouring to please him; for unless we believe that he is, and that he will reward those that seek to please him, it is impossible, that is, it is unreasonable to think men should attempt to please him. So that faith is the cause and principle of religion; it is the thing, *quo posito, ponitur effectus; et quo sublato, tollitur.* Do but suppose and admit that a man truly believes there is a God, and he will seek to please him: but if you suppose a man believes no such thing, he will cast off all religion. This is the plain meaning of the words; not, as some have thought, that without faith a man may perform religious actions, but then they would not be accepted, or pleasing to God: but that which the apostle means is, Without faith it is impossible there should be any religion: not that religious acts should be performed in an acceptable manner; as if Cain had offered as good a sacrifice as Abel, only faith made the difference; but Cain did not believe, was not persuaded of the being of God and his excellency, therefore thought to put

God off with any thing; Abel believed, and did offer a more excellent sacrifice, not more excellent because it was mixed with faith, but it was more excellent in itself.

The observation therefore from these words is this: that faith is one great principle of all religious actions.

In the handling of this, I shall endeavour,

First, To fix and settle the true notion of faith, whereby we may come to understand the general nature of it.

Secondly, To confirm the truth of the proposition.

Thirdly, Draw some inferences from hence.

First, To settle and fix the true notion of faith, whereby we may come to understand the general nature of it. I find that most who write upon this subject have marvellously puzzled themselves with the various acceptations of this word πίστις, and the verb πιστεύειν, insomuch that some have undertaken to enumerate above twenty distinct significations of this word. I cannot find so many, it may be others may; but hereby, instead of clearing the notion of faith, they have involved it, and made it more intricate, and have made men believe, that it is a notion very remote from common understanding: whereas there is not any word that is in common use that is more plain and easy, and which any one may understand better than this of faith and believing.

Therefore, in the explication of it, I shall attend to the use of it in common speech, and in all authors, as well profane as sacred: and I shall not guide myself by terms of art, which have been received in the schools, and have confounded the

meaning of words, by distorting them from the common and received use of them; but shall govern myself by the nature of the things to which this word in common use is applied.

I shall remove two acceptations of it which are less usual, and then fix the common and general notion of it, to which all the other more particular significations may be referred. The two less usual acceptations are these:

First, It is sometimes put for the particular grace or virtue which is called fidelity, or faithfulness in our promises and contracts; and in this sense it is sometimes used in common discourse, and in all sorts of writers. I shall only mention a text or two where it is so taken: (Matt. xxiii. 23.) "And have omitted the weightier things of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith," that is, fidelity. And (Rom. iii. 3.) with relation to God, "Shall their unbelief make the faith of God of none effect?" that is, his faithfulness in his promises. (Tit. ii. 10.) "Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity," πίστιν πᾶσαν, "all faith."

Secondly, It is sometimes put for spiritual gifts, and particularly the gift of miracles, which were wrought by the power of faith. (Rom. xii. 3.) "According as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith;" that is, of spiritual gifts of prophesying, or ministry, or exhortation, as it is explained afterward. (1 Cor. xii. 2.) "To another is given faith by the same Spirit;" that is, a power of miracles in general, as learned interpreters think. Nor doth that which is added afterwards, that "to another is given the working of miracles," prejudice this interpretation; for ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων, "the operation of powers," which we render "of miracles," seems

to signify some special sort of miracles, not the power of miracles in general. And this seems to be favoured by the acceptation of it in the next chapter, ver. 2. "And though I had all faith, so that I could remove mountains;" where faith is undoubtedly taken for the power of miracles.

These being removed, as very alien and remote from the common and usual acceptation of the word, I come now to fix the general notion of faith, to which all other acceptations of it may easily be reduced; and it is this:

Faith is a persuasion of the mind concerning any thing; concerning the truth of any proposition; concerning the existence, or futurition, or lawfulness, or convenience, or possibility, or goodness, of any thing, or the contrary; or concerning the credit of a person, or the contrary. And this notion is not only agreeable to the proper notion of the word πίστις, which comes from πείθω, to persuade, but is warranted from the common use of it in this latitude. It is ordinary for men to say, they believe, or are persuaded, such a proposition is true or false, such a thing is or is not, such an event will be or will not be; that such an action is lawful or unlawful, such a thing is good or bad, convenient or inconvenient, possible or impossible to be done; or that they believe such a person, or do not believe him. And I could shew from Scripture, that believing is applied to all these matters, and many more; I will only instance in one or two.

That faith is frequently used for the persuasion of the truth of a doctrine, or of the veracity of God or Christ, I shall not need to produce any texts, there are so many.

That faith is used for a persuasion of the lawful-

ness of an action, the 14th chapter to the Romans doth abundantly testify. (Ver. 2.) "One believeth that he may eat all things;" that is, is persuaded in his mind that all sorts of meat are lawful without distinction. (Ver. 22.) "Hast thou faith?" that is, art thou persuaded or satisfied in thy mind of the lawfulness of those indifferent things he had been speaking of? (Ver. 23.) "He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith, is sin;" that is, whatever is not done with the persuasion and satisfaction of our minds that we may lawfully do it, "is sin." I shall trouble you with no more instances.

Now this being the general notion of faith, that it is a persuasion of the mind concerning any thing, from hence by a metonymy it comes to be put for the argument whereby this persuasion is wrought in us. Hence it is, that among the rhetoricians πίστεις are any kind of argument or proof which orators make use of to persuade men; and there is one place in the New Testament, where πίστις seems to be used in this sense, or very near it, (Acts xvii. 31.) "Because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world," &c. "whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead," πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν, "having offered faith to all men;" that is, having given us this argument for the proof of it, that "he raised Christ from the dead."

Sometimes it is put for the object of this persuasion, or the matter or thing whereof we are persuaded. And thus frequently in the New Testament, the gospel, which is the object of our faith, the thing which we believe, is called faith. And thus you find it used in that phrase of "obedience to the faith," that is, to the gospel, (Acts vi. 7.

Rom. i. 5; xvi. 26.) And in this sense faith, that is the gospel, is frequently opposed to the dispensation of the law, (Rom. iii. 27, 31, and x. 16, Gal. i. 23.) "He that persecuted us in times past, now preacheth the faith which he once destroyed." (Gal. iii. 2.) The hearing of the gospel is called the "hearing of faith;" (ver. 23.) "Before faith came;" (and ver. 25.) "But after that faith is come." (Eph. iv. 5.) "There is one faith," that is, one gospel which we believe. (1 Tim. iv. 6.) "Nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine."

The opposites to faith, are unbelief and credulity. Unbelief, which is a not being persuaded of a thing, is the deficient extreme: or doubting, if it prevail to a degree of unbelief: and credulity, which is an easiness to believe things without any probable argument to induce our persuasion, is the redundant extreme.

The seat or subject of faith is the mind, or the heart, as the Scripture usually calls it. "With the heart man believes," that is, with the soul: for I do not understand any real distinction of faculties; but if you will distinguish them, the proper seat of this persuasion is the understanding; the immediate effect of it is upon the will; by which it works upon the affections and the life.

And faith in this general notion is not opposed to error, and knowledge, and opinion: but comprehends all these under it. For if a man be persuaded of that which is false, he "believes a lie," as the Scripture expresseth it; a man may be certainly persuaded of a thing, that is, firmly believe it, which is *knowledge;* a man may be probably persuaded of a thing, that is, believe it with some diffidence and uncertainty, and that is *opinion.*

But for our better understanding of this general

notion of faith, we will take into consideration these four things :

I. The cause of it, or the argument whereby it is wrought.

II. The degrees of it, and the difference of them.

III. The natural efficacy and operation of it.

IV. The several kinds of it.

I. We will consider the cause of faith, or the argument whereby it is wrought. Now all the arguments whereby faith may be wrought in us, that is, a persuasion of any thing, will I think fall under one of these four heads ; sense, experience, reason drawn from the thing, or the authority and testimony of some person.

1. Sense. Hence it is commonly said, that "seeing is believing," that is, one of the best arguments to persuade us of any thing. That faith may be wrought by this argument, appears both from the nature of the thing, nothing being more apt to persuade us of any thing than our senses ; and from several expressions in Scripture. I will instance in one for all. (John xx. 8.) "Then went in also the other disciple into the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed." And whereas Scripture opposeth faith to sight, as, (2 Cor. v. 7.) "We walk by faith, and not by sight;" (Heb. xi. 1.) "It is the evidence of things not seen;" we are to understand that only concerning a belief of the things of another world, which are futurities, and invisible, which the apostle is there speaking of; or of things which are of the same nature with these, as things past: not but that a man may very well be induced to believe a thing by his senses.

2. Experience ; which, though it may be sensible, and then it is the same argument with

sense; yet sometimes it is not, and then it is an argument distinct from it. As for example: a man may by experience be persuaded or induced to believe this proposition—that his will is free, that he can do this, or not do it; which is a better argument than a demonstration to the contrary, if there could be one.

3. Reasons drawn from the thing; which may either be necessary and concluding, or else only probable and plausible.

4. The authority and testimony of some credible person. Now two things give authority and credit to the relation, or testimony, or assertion of a person concerning any thing; ability and integrity. Ability, if he can be presumed to have a competent knowledge of what he relates, or asserts, or testifies; and integrity, if he may be presumed to be honest in his relation, and free from any design, or will to deceive. And to these heads, I think all arguments of belief may be reduced.

II. The second thing to be considered is the degrees of faith, and the difference of them. And that there are degrees, I take for granted, though I shall afterwards have occasion to prove it in a Divine faith; and these depend perfectly upon the capacity of the person that believes, or is persuaded. Now the capacity, or incapacity of persons are infinitely various, and not to be reduced to theory; but supposing a competent capacity in the person, then the degrees of faith or persuasion take their difference from the arguments, or motives, or inducements which are used to persuade. Where sense is the argument, there is the highest and firmest degree of faith, or persuasion. Next to that is experience, which is beyond any argument or reason from the thing. The faith or

persuasion which is wrought in us by reasons from the thing, the degrees of it are as the reasons are: if they be necessary and concluding, it is firm and certain in its kind; if only probable, according to the degrees of probability, it hath more or less of doubting mixed with it. Lastly, the faith which is wrought in us by testimony or authority of a person, takes its degrees from the credit of a person, that is, his ability and integrity. Now because "all men are liars," that is, either may deceive, or be deceived, their testimony partakes of their infirmity, and so doth the degree of persuasion wrought by it: but God being both infallible and true, and consequently it being impossible that he should either deceive, or be deceived, his testimony begets the firmest persuasion, and the highest degree of faith in its kind. But then it is to be considered, that there not being a revelation of a revelation *in infinitum*; that this is a Divine testimony and revelation, we can only have rational assurance; and the degree of the faith or persuasion which is wrought by a Divine testimony will be according to the strength of the arguments which we have to persuade us that such a testimony is Divine.

III. For the efficacy or operation of faith we are to consider, that the things we may believe or be persuaded of are of two sorts. Either, 1. They are such as do not concern me; and then the mind rests in a naked and simple belief of them, and a faith or persuasion of such things has no effect upon me; but is apt to have, if ever it happen that the matter do concern me: or else, 2. The thing I believe or am persuaded of doth concern me; and then it hath several effects according to the nature of the thing

I am persuaded of, or the degree of the persuasion, or the capacity of the person that believes or is persuaded. If the thing believed be of great moment, the effect of the faith is proportionable, *cæteris paribus;* and so according to the degree of the persuasion: but if the person be indisposed to the proper effects of such a persuasion by the power of contrary habits, as it often happens, the effect will be obtained with more difficulty, and may possibly be totally defeated, by casting off the persuasion: for while it remains, it will operate, and endeavour and strive to work its proper effect. For example: a man may believe that wine is very pernicious to him; and yet a strong inclination to it may render it very difficult for this persuasion to work its proper effect upon him, which is to leave off wine, and may at length wholly defeat it, by furnishing him with some colour of argument that may persuade him otherwise.

IV. For the kinds of faith, they are several, according to the variety of objects or things believed. I shall reduce them all under these two general heads:

1. Faith is either civil or human, under which I comprehend the persuasion of things moral, and natural, and political, and the like: or,

2. Divine and religious; that is, a persuasion of things that concern religion. I know not whether these terms be proper, nor am I very solicitous, because I know none fitter, and tell you what I mean by them.

The first kind of faith, concerning things human and civil, I shall not speak of, it being besides my design.

The second, which I call a religious and Divine faith, comprehends three things under it, which are distinctly to be considered.

1. A persuasion of the principles of natural religion, which are known by the light of nature; as, the existence of a God, the immortality of the soul, and a future state.

2. A persuasion of things supernatural and revealed.

3. A persuasion of supernatural revelation.—These I design fully to handle. Thus I have prepared materials for a large discourse; which, though it be necessary, is, I am sensible, but too tedious, and yet possibly more tedious to me than you.

SERMON CCXIX.

OF A RELIGIOUS AND DIVINE FAITH.

But without faith it is impossible to please God.—HEB. xi. 6.

IN my last discourse I came to treat of a religious and Divine faith, which, I told you, comprehends under it three things, which I now proceed to consider distinctly.

First, A persuasion of the principles of natural religion which are known by the light of nature.

Secondly, A persuasion of things supernatural and revealed.

Thirdly, A persuasion of supernatural revelation.

First, A persuasion of the principles of natural religion, such as the light of nature could discover; such are the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and a future state. The things to be inquired concerning this kind of faith are these:

I. Whether this be truly and properly called faith.

II. What are the arguments whereby it is wrought.

III. Whether it admit of degrees or not, and what differences are observable in them.

IV. What are the proper and genuine effects of it.

V. In what sense it may be said to be Divine faith.

I. Whether it may truly and properly be called faith, or not? If the general notion of faith which I

have fixed before, viz. That it is a persuasion of the mind concerning any thing, be a true notion of faith, then there is no doubt but this may as properly be called faith, as any thing can be; because a man may be persuaded in his mind concerning these things, that there is a God, that our souls are immortal, that there is another state after this life.

But besides this, if the Scripture speaks properly, as we have reason to believe it does, especially when it treats professedly of any thing, as the apostle here does, then this question is fully decided: for it is evident to any one that will but read this verse, out of which I have taken my text, that the apostle doth here in this place speak of this kind of faith; that is, a belief or persuasion of the principles of natural religion. For after the apostle had said, that "without faith it is impossible to please God," he immediately instanceth in the belief of the principles of natural religion, as necessary to the pleasing of God, that is, to make a man religious. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is;" there is the existence of God, the first principle of natural religion; "and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him;" which implies the other two, the immortality of the soul, and a future state; for if good men shall be rewarded, there must be a subject capable of such rewards, which brings in the immortality of the soul; and there must be a season for these rewards, which because they are seldom bestowed in this world, there must be a season when they shall, which brings in a future state after this life. So that whoever denies that a persuasion of these principles of natural religion may properly be called

faith, he quarrels with the apostle, and does not correct me, but the Scriptures.

II. What are the arguments whereby this faith, or the persuasion of these principles of natural religion, is wrought? You may remember that I reduced all those arguments, whereby any kind of faith or persuasion is wrought in us, to these four heads; sense, experience, reasons drawn from the thing, and the testimony or authority of some person. Now a faith or persuasion of these principles cannot be wrought in us by sense; for "no man hath seen God at any time," and being a pure spirit, he cannot be the object of any corporeal sense. Nor can the soul, or any mode of its existence, fall under any of our senses; nor a future state; because sense is only of things present. Nor can it be wrought in us merely by experience: for no man can conclude from any thing he experienceth in himself that there is a God, unless he be first persuaded of it by other arguments: and the immortality of the soul, and a future state, are things which none in this life can experience. Nor can the authority or testimony of any person be the argument that induceth that persuasion. Not any human authority: for these things are of such consequence, and so much depends upon them, that is, the belief of them puts us upon so many things which men would not do if they did not believe them; as particularly the venturing of our lives upon the account of religion, and all our worldly interests, if occasion call for it; that it were a fond thing to take matters of such moment and importance upon any man's bare word, without other assurance of them. Nor can the testimony or authority of God be the argument that persuades

me of the existence of a God. I grant that for the other two, the immortality of the soul, and a future state, it is an excellent, and may be a sufficient argument. Though that these may be proved likewise by other arguments without a revelation, is evident in the heathens, who by the light of nature did assent to them without a revelation. But a Divine revelation cannot possibly be an argument inducing me to believe the existence of a God, for this plain reason; because a Divine revelation can be no argument to any that is not persuaded that it is a Divine revelation: but before I can be persuaded that any revelation is from God, I must be persuaded there is a God; and if so, there is no need of this argument to prove to me that there is one: and therefore, you do not find it any where revealed in all the Scripture, that there is a God. The Scripture often declares that Jehovah is the true and living God, and that "besides him there is no other:" but it doth not reveal, but every where suppose, that there is one.

It remains, then, that it must be another kind of argument whereby we must be persuaded of the existence of a God, and that is, by such reasons as may be drawn from things themselves to persuade us hereof; as, either from the notion and idea which we have of a God; that he is a being that hath all perfections, whereof necessary existence is one, and consequently that he must be; or else from the universal consent of all nations, and the generality of persons agreeing in this apprehension, which cannot be attributed reasonably to any other cause, than to impressions stamped upon our understandings by God himself; or (which is most plain of all) from this visible frame of the world, which we cannot,

without great violence to our understandings, impute to any other cause than a Being endowed with infinite goodness, and power, and wisdom, which is that we call God.

As for the other two principles of natural religion, the immortality of the soul, and a future state, after we believe a God, we may be persuaded of these from Divine revelation; and that doth give us the highest and firmest assurance of them in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Yet I do not find but that these also are rather supposed, than expressly revealed, in the Bible. Indeed, the immortality of the soul may be inferred from several places of Scripture, and the tenor of the whole Bible: and so a future state, which, as for the thing itself, seems to be supposed as a thing acknowledged by natural light; only the Scripture hath revealed the circumstances of it more particularly to us, and given us higher assurance of the thing: but if there were no revelation, men might be persuaded of these; and so the heathens were by arguments drawn partly from the operations of the soul, which would almost persuade any man that the soul is immortal; it being altogether unimaginable how a principle that is nothing else but matter, can either understand, or determine itself by its own will; all the motions of matter that we know of, or can imagine, being necessary; and partly from the justice and goodness of God. The consideration of God's goodness would persuade a man, that as he made all things very good, so he made them of the longest duration they were capable of; and the justice of God would easily induce a man to believe, seeing the providence of God doth generally in this life deal promiscuously with good

and bad men, that there shall be a day which will make a difference, and every man shall receive according to his works.

But I do not intend to insist upon these arguments; all that I design is, to shew what kind of arguments do work a faith and persuasion in men concerning these principles of natural religion; and they are reasons drawn from the thing.

And it is not always necessary to the working of this faith or persuasion, that these reasons should necessarily, yea, or truly conclude the principle to be believed; if they do it probably, and it appear so to me, it is enough to beget a persuasion in me of such a thing. There are many men entertain the greatest truths, and are firmly persuaded of them, upon an incompetent argument, and such as might persuade them of any thing else as well; and such persons, if they have capacity and understanding, they are rather happy than wise in their religion. It falls out well that they happen to be in the right; for they might have been in the wrong upon the same terms. But if the persons who believe the principles of religion on insufficient arguments, and their belief have a real effect upon them, as it will if it be true and permanent, if they be ignorant, and such as want the ordinary advantage of improving their knowledge, they are wise enough; that is, they are as wise as God's providence hath made them, and the circumstances of their education, and the condition of their life, will let them be.

The third thing to be inquired is, Whether this faith or persuasion of the principles of natural religion admit degrees or not? And what differences are observable in them? That it does admit degrees, that is, that a man may be more or less per-

suaded of the truth of those principles, is evident from the heathens; some of whom did yield a more firm and unshaken assent to them; others entertained them with a more faint persuasion of them, especially of the immortality of the soul, and a future state, about which most of them had many qualms and doubts. Of all the heathens, Socrates seems to have had the truest and firmest persuasion of these things; which he did not only testify in words, but by the constancy, and calmness, and sedate courage which he manifested at his death. Indeed in his discourse before his death, he says, "He did not know whether his soul shall remain after his body, and whether there be a happiness reserved for good men in another world: but he thought so, and had such hopes of it, that he was very willing to venture his life upon these hopes." Which words, though they seem to be spoke doubtingly, as the manner of the Academy was; yet, considering his manner of speaking, which was modest, and not peremptory and dogmatical, they signify as great a confidence as he had of any thing, and they are high expressions of assurance. For we may believe that the man who dies for any thing, how modestly soever he may express himself, is very well assured of the truth of it. So that this faith and persuasion admits of degrees, the difference whereof is to be resolved partly into the capacity of the persons who believe, and partly into the strength, or at least appearance of strength, in the arguments whereby it is wrought.

The fourth thing to be inquired is, What are the proper and genuine effects of this faith or persuasion? Now that, in a word, is natural religion, which consists in apprehensions of God suitable to his nature,

and affections towards him suitable to these apprehensions, and actions suitable to both. He that believes there is such a being in the world as God, that is, one infinitely good, and wise, and powerful, and just, and holy, and (in a word) clothed with all excellency, will have a great esteem and reverence for him, and love to him, which he will testify in those outward expressions of respect which we call worship. He that believes that this being is the original of all good, that he made the world, and all the creatures in it, and preserves and governs them, he will depend upon him, and seek to him for every good thing, and acknowledge him for the author of them; which brings in prayer and thanksgiving. He that believes that he owes his being to God, and all the blessings of his life, will think it reasonable that he should be at his disposal, will be willing to be governed by his laws, and ready to submit to his pleasure; which brings in obedience and submission to the will of God. He that believes there is another life after this, wherein men shall be rewarded or punished, according as they have demeaned themselves well or ill in this world, he will be encouraged to piety and virtue, and afraid to do any thing which his own reason tells him is displeasing to the Deity, as he cannot but believe every thing is, that is contrary to the nature of God, or the perfection of his own nature, or the good order and happiness of the world; which brings in temperance and justice, and all other real virtues. And that the belief of these principles had this effect upon several of the heathens, to make them in a good degree religious and virtuous, I doubt not; the moral and honest lives of many of them, give real testimony of this; which natural religion

and morality of theirs, how far it may avail them for their good, we are not concerned to determine. This we are sure of, that it will make their condition more tolerable in another world; and if they fall under condemnation, it will mitigate and allay their misery.

V. In what sense this faith or persuasion of the principles of natural religion may be said to be Divine? In these two respects:

1. In respect of the object of it, or matters to be believed, which are Divine, and do immediately concern religion, in opposition to that which I call a civil and human faith, which is of such things as do not immediately concern God and religion.

2. In respect of the Divine effect of it, which are to make men religious, and like God. And a faith may as properly be said to be Divine in respect of the object of it, as in respect of the argument whereby it is wrought; so that a faith of the principles of natural religion is as truly Divine, though it be not wrought in us by the arguments of Divine testimony and authority, as a faith of the matters of Divine revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures: for why a faith may not as well be said to be Divine for its relation to God as the object of it, as for its relation to the testimony of God, as the cause of it, I cannot understand.

Secondly, The second sort of faith, which I call Divine or religious, is a persuasion of things supernaturally revealed, of things which are not known by natural light, but by some more immediate manifestation and discovery from God. Thus we find our Saviour (Matt. xvi. 15—17.) opposeth Divine revelation to the discovery of natural reason and light. He asks his disciples whom they believed

him to be, "Whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, (that is, the Messias) the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee; but my Father which is in heaven;" where a revelation or discovery from flesh and blood, is opposed to a revelation from God; "flesh and blood" being a Hebrew phrase or manner of speaking, signifying a mere man, or something merely human; so we find the phrase used, Eph. vi. 12. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood; but against principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickedness;" that is, the enemies we are to contend with, are not only men, but devils; and which is nearer to our purpose, (Gal. i. 16.) where the apostle would express to us, that he received not his commission from men, but immediately from the Lord Jesus Christ, he tells us, that "when it pleased God, who separated him from his mother's womb, and called him by his grace, to reveal his Son in him, that he might preach him among the heathen, immediately he conferred not with flesh and blood;" the word is προσανεθέμην, "I did not apply myself to flesh and blood;" that is, I did not go to men to receive my commission from them: for so he explains it in the next words, "neither went I up to Jerusalem, to them that were apostles before me:" that is, I did not apply myself to the apostles, to derive any authority from them to preach the gospel, because he had no need of that, being called immediately by Christ to this work; which words are nothing else but a farther explication of what he had said before, (ver. 11, 12.) "I

certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me, is not after men: for I neither received it of man, neither was taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." So accordingly here our Saviour tells Peter, that this truth, that Christ was the Messias, the Son of the living God, was not revealed to him by man, nor by any mere human principle or testimony, "but by his Father which was in heaven;" that is, by the testimony which God himself gave of him in the holy and Divine gospel which he taught, and those miracles which he wrought in confirmation of it.

So that this kind of faith is a persuasion of such things, as are not known by natural light, nor discovered to us by men; but some way or other revealed by God: I say, some way or other, for the ways of God's revealing and manifesting himself to us, are various and arbitrary. God may choose what ways he pleaseth to discover himself to us by. So the apostle tells us, (Heb. i. 1.) "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets." God revealed himself, as at several times, by several steps and degrees, so in various manners; sometimes by visions, sometimes by dreams, sometimes by oracles, sometimes by a spirit of prophecy, sometimes by a voice from heaven, and sometimes by a secret and gentle inspiration. Now it matters not which of these ways God chooseth to reveal himself to us, provided we have sufficient evidence and grounds of assurance that the thing is revealed by God.

As to us, these extraordinary ways of revelation are now ceased, and we have a fixed and a standing revelation, that is, the records of those revelations

which God formerly made to holy men; and this is the Holy Scriptures, or the Bible, which is a system or collection of things supernaturally revealed.

Now if this faith be considered as restrained to a part of Divine revelation, viz. the doctrine of the gospel, revealed to the world by Jesus Christ, then it is properly Christian faith, which frequently, in the New Testament, is called faith, κατ' ἐξοχήν, by way of excellency and eminency, this being the most eminent and perfect revelation which God hath made of himself to the world, which the apostle, at the beginning of this Epistle, advanceth above all those former revelations which God had made of himself to the fathers, those being by his servants and ministers, prophets and angels: "But in these last days God hath revealed himself to us by his Son, whom he hath made heir of all things," and advanced to a dignity above that of men or angels.

And with relation to this faith of the gospel, Christians are peculiarly and eminently called believers: (1 Thess. ii. 10.) "You know how unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe," that is, among you Christians. (2 Thess. i. 10.) "When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe," meaning the Christians that entertain the gospel. And upon the same account, the apostle calls the whole society, or body of Christians, "the household of faith," (Gal. vi. 10.)

But now I am considering faith, not in this more narrow and restrained sense, for a belief or persuasion of the doctrine of the gospel; but in a more large and comprehensive sense, for a persuasion of all things that are supernaturally revealed, that is, of all things contained in the Holy Scriptures.

Now, all the matters of Divine revelation, which

are contained in the book of Holy Scripture, may, I think, be reduced to one of these six heads:

1. They are either a history or relation of some person, or matter of fact; and a faith of the historical part of Scripture, is nothing else but a persuasion that those narrations, or relations, are true. Or,

2. A prophecy, or prediction of some event. Now a faith of the prophetical part of Scripture, is a persuasion that the event foretold will certainly come to pass. Or,

3. A doctrine: such as are all those propositions in Scripture, which declare to us the nature or properties of God, the nature and office of Christ, that he is the eternal Son of God, that is, true God, the Messias, or Saviour of the world, the king, priest, and prophet of his church, and the like. Now a faith of the doctrinal part of Scripture, is a persuasion, that those propositions which contain these doctrines are true. Or,

4. Laws for the ordering and governing of our spirits and lives, under which I comprehend all the precepts and prohibitions of Scripture, which are the matter of our duty. Now a faith of these, is a persuasion, that God hath commanded, and forbidden such things; and consequently that they are necessary to be observed by us. Or,

5. Promises of good things, either with relation to this life or the other. Now a faith of the promises, is a persuasion or confident expectation that they will be accomplished. And thus the apostle describes the faith of the promises of another world, at the first verse of this chapter, that it is "the substance of things hoped for," ὑπόστασις, that is, a "confident expectation" that the promises of the gospel,

which are the matter of our hope, shall be accomplished; "and the evidence of things not seen," a being convinced of the certainty and reality of future and invisible things. And thus likewise, the apostle explains to us the faith of Abraham, in reference to the promises of God, to give him a son: (Rom. iv. 21.) "He was fully persuaded, that what he had promised he was able to perform." Or,

6. Threatenings. Now a faith of the threatenings, is a persuasion of the danger we incur, if we neglect our duty; that is, a belief that God justly may, and will (having confirmed his threatenings with an oath, which is a sign of the immutable determination of the Divine will) inflict those punishments upon us, which he hath threatened, in case we disobey his laws. These six heads do, I think, contain all, I am sure the most principal matters of Divine revelation, which I have the more carefully distinguished, because some of them are of a distinct and peculiar consideration from the rest, as will afterwards appear.

Having thus, as plainly and briefly as I could, opened to you, what I mean by this second sort of Divine faith, which is a persuasion of things supernaturally revealed, I come now to satisfy such inquiries about this as may be most material. And here I shall proceed upon those heads of inquiry which I handled when I spake of the first sort of Divine faith.

I. Whether this may truly and properly be called faith?

II. What is the argument whereby this faith is wrought?

III. Whether it admit of degrees, and what are the differences of them?

IV. What are the proper and genuine effects of this faith?

V. In what respects it may be said to be Divine?

I. Whether this may truly and properly be called faith? And that it may, is evident, because the general definition of faith agrees to it; for a man may be persuaded in his mind concerning things supernaturally revealed; and the Scripture every where calls a persuasion of these matters by the name of faith. But besides this, it seems this is the adequate and only notion of faith, as it hath been fixed by the schools, and is become a term of art. For the definition that the schools give of faith is this; that it is an assent to a thing credible, as credible. Now, say they, that is credible which relies upon the testimony of a credible person; and consequently, a human faith is that which relies upon human testimony; and a Divine faith, that which relies upon the testimony or authority of God; which definition, though it be short and imperfect, (being, indeed, not a definition of faith in general, but of a particular kind of faith, viz. that which is wrought by the argument which we call testimony or authority, and consequently excludes a belief of the principles of natural religion, and a belief that the Scriptures are the word of God, from being faith), yet this shews thus much, that all agree in this, that a persuasion of things supernaturally revealed is truly and properly faith.

II. What is the argument whereby this faith or persuasion of things supernaturally revealed is wrought in us? And this, by the general consent of all, is the testimony or authority of God, some way or other revealing these things to us; whose infallible and unerring knowledge, together with his

goodness and authority, gives us the highest assurance, that he neither can be deceived himself, nor will deceive us in any thing that he reveals to us. I say, the testimony or authority of God some way or other revealing things to us, is the argument whereby a faith of any supernatural revelation is wrought in us: but if we restrain all supernatural revelations to the Bible, as I told you we know of no other, then the particular kind of testimony whereby this faith is wrought in us, is the written word of God.

III. As to the degrees of this faith. Supposing men sufficiently satisfied that the Scriptures are the word of God, that is, a Divine revelation; then all those who are sufficiently satisfied of this, do equally believe the things contained in the Scriptures. For if men be once fully satisfied that God hath spoken any thing, I think no man makes the least doubt but what God says is true. Now, there can be no degrees of faith where there is no doubt of the contrary; all the degrees that are in faith arising from a greater or less mixture of doubting. So that those who do not at all doubt but that the Scriptures are the word of God, have the same degree of persuasion concerning the matters contained in them; and that no man doubts whether what God says is true, ariseth from the fixed and constant notion which men universally have of God, that he is infallible and true. Therefore, we find, (Matt. xxi. 25.) when our Saviour puts the dilemma to the pharisees concerning the baptism of John, "whether it were from heaven, or of men?" that "they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why then did ye not believe him?" Which kind of reasoning

imports thus much: that it is universally acknowledged, that no man can in reason make the least doubt of that which he believes to be from God. Therefore, a man would wonder what Becanus, the Jesuit, meant, unless it were to abuse the prophets and apostles, when he says, (tom. iii.) of his school-divinity, that the prophets and apostles had *evidentiam revelationis, non autem evidentiam primæ veritatis: tametsi enim evidenter cognoscerent Deum esse, qui ipsis revelabat mysteria fidei, non tamen evidenter cognoscebant Deum esse summe veracem, qui nec falli potuit, nec fallere:* that is, "Though it was sufficiently evident to the prophets and apostles, that those revelations which they had were from God, yet it was not evident to them, that Divine revelations are true; for though they did evidently know, that there was a God, who revealed to them the mysteries of faith, yet they did not evidently know that God was infallible and true, who could neither deceive nor be deceived." By which he doth not only make the prophets and apostles idiots, and destitute of one of the most common notions of human nature, which is, that God is infallible and true; but he doth likewise make all Divine revelation useless, and to no purpose. For, to what purpose is it for a man to be satisfied, that God reveals such a thing to him; if he be in the mean time unsatisfied, whether what God reveals is true? for no man that is unsatisfied, whether what God reveals be true, can, upon any tolerable ground of reason, yield a firm assent to Divine revelation. But it is pity to spend time in confuting any thing which confutes itself by its own absurdity, and its direct contradiction to the common notions of human nature. I proceed, therefore.

Supposing any man be unsatisfied, and do make any doubt whether these books called the Holy Scriptures, or any of them, be the word of God, that is, a Divine revelation; proportionably to the degree of his doubting concerning the Divine authority of the Scriptures, there will be an abatement of his faith, as to the things contained in them: for he that believes a thing merely upon the credit or testimony of such a person; so much reason as he hath to doubt, whether such a person did speak, or testify such a thing, so much reason he hath to doubt whether the thing be true.

And upon this account I think it is, that the Scripture speaks of degrees of faith; of growing and increasing in faith; of a strong faith, that is, such a faith as was either wholly, or in a great measure, free from doubting; and of a weak faith, that is, such a faith as had a great mixture of doubting; by which we are not to understand, that they doubted of the truth of any thing of which they were satisfied by a Divine revelation; but that they doubted whether such things were Divine revelations or not. So that the great doubt of the disciples was, whether Christ were the true Messias, and really the Son of God; for so far as they were satisfied of that, they could not doubt of any thing he said.

IV. What are the proper and genuine effects of this faith? The proper and genuine effects of the belief of the Scriptures in general, is the conformity of our hearts and lives to what we believe; that is, to be such persons, and to live such lives, as it becomes those who do heartily believe, and are really persuaded of the truth of the Scriptures. And if this be a constant and abiding persuasion, it will produce this effect; but with more or less difficulty,

according to the disposition of the subject, and the weakness or strength of contrary habits and inclinations. More particularly the effects of this faith are according to the nature of the matter believed. If it be a history or relation of things past, or prophecy of things to come; it hath an effect upon men so far as the history or prophecy doth concern them. If it be a doctrine; it hath the effect which the particular nature and tendency of such a doctrine requires. For instance: the doctrine of God's goodness is apt to inflame us with love to him; of his power and justice, with a fear and awe of him. This doctrine, that Christ is the Saviour of the world, the proper effect of it is to make men rely upon him for salvation; and so of the rest. If it be a precept, the proper effect of it is obedience: and hence it is that unbelief and disobedience are frequently put for one another in Scripture; and disobedience is opposed to faith; (1 Pet. ii. 7.) "Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient," &c. where the disobedient are opposed to them that believe. And so likewise those who neglect any duty of religion, and do any thing notoriously unworthy of their profession, are said to deny the faith. (1 Tim. v. 8.) "But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith." How does he deny the faith? In disobeying the precepts of the Christian religion, which chargeth us with such natural and moral duties. If it be a promise, the proper effect of it is encouragement to obedience by hopes of the thing promised: if a threatening, the proper effect of it is to restrain men from sin and disobedience.

V. In what sense this faith of things supernatu-

rally revealed, may be said to be a Divine faith? Answer.—Not only in respect of the matter and object of it, which are Divine things, such as concern God and religion and in respect of the Divine effects it hath upon those who believe these things; (for in these two respects a persuasion of the principles of natural religion, may be said to be a Divine faith;) but likewise in respect of the argument whereby it is wrought, which is a Divine testimony. As for the efficient cause, the Spirit of God, that does not immediately belong to this: for the Spirit of God doth not, speaking properly, persuade us immediately of the truth of things supernaturally revealed; but mediately, by persuading us of the truth of the revelation: for to believe a thing to be true, which we are persuaded is revealed by God, is so natural and consequent upon such a persuasion, that it doth not seem to require any new work of the Spirit. And if this be all the work of the Spirit, to persuade men that such a revelation is Divine; it will be most proper to speak of this when I come to the third sort of faith, which is, a persuasion of a Divine revelation that it is such: which because it hath many difficulties in it, deserves a more large and particular consideration.

SERMON CCXX.

OF THE FAITH OR PERSUASION OF A DIVINE REVELATION.

But without faith it is impossible to please God.—Heb. xi. 6.

I have observed, that a religious and Divine faith comprehends under it three things:

First, A persuasion of the principles of natural religion, which are known by the light of nature.

Secondly, A persuasion of things supernatural and revealed.

Thirdly, A persuasion of supernatural revelation.

The two former of these I have considered, and now proceed to the

Third sort of faith, which I call Divine or religious; viz. a persuasion concerning a Divine revelation, that it is such: which I distinguish from the former thus. The former is a persuasion concerning the things which are revealed from God, that they are true: this is a persuasion concerning the revelation itself, that it is Divine and from God.

For the opening of this there are many things to be taken into consideration.

I. What we understand by a Divine revelation.

II. The several kinds of it.

III. Whether a persuasion concerning a Divine revelation be properly faith.

IV. How we may come to be assured of a Divine revelation, or by what arguments a faith or persuasion of a Divine revelation is wrought in us.

V. The degrees of this persuasion or assurance.

VI. The effects of it.

VII. In what sense it may be said to be a Divine faith; under which I shall speak something concerning the testimony of the Spirit.

I. What we are to understand by a Divine revelation.—Answer. A supernatural discovery or manifestation of things to us. I say supernatural, because it may either be immediately by God, or by the mediation of angels: as most, if not all the revelations of the Old Testament were; a supernatural discovery, or manifestation, either immediately to our minds, and inward faculties; (for I do not so well understand the distinction between understanding and imagination, as to be careful to take notice of it;) or else mediately to our understandings, by the mediation of our outward senses; as, by an external appearance to our bodily eyes, or by a voice and sound to the sense of hearing. But of this I have discoursed in a former sermon, * and therefore shall add no more here.

II. For the several kinds of Divine revelation; of this also I have formerly † discoursed at large.

III. Whether a persuasion of a Divine revelation may properly be called faith? To this I answer, that, according to the strait and narrow notion of faith which the schools have fixed, which is an assent to any thing grounded upon the testimony and authority of God revealing it, a persuasion of a Divine revelation cannot properly be called faith; because it is irrational to expect that a man should have another Divine revelation to assure him that this is a Divine revelation: for then, for the same

* See Sermon CXXVI. vol. vi. p. 213. † Ibid.

reason, I must expect another Divine revelation to assure me of that, and so without end. But I have sufficiently shewn, that this is not the true notion of faith in general, but only of a particular kind of faith; viz. that which is wrought by the argument, which we call testimony or authority. But according to the true and general notion of faith, which is a persuasion of the mind concerning any thing, a persuasion of the mind concerning a Divine revelation, may as properly be called faith, as any thing else, if men will but grant, that a man may be so satisfied, concerning a Divine revelation, as verily to believe and be persuaded that it is so.

IV. How we may come to be persuaded of a Divine revelation, that it is such; or by what arguments this persuasion is wrought in us? For answer to this, it will be requisite distinctly to consider,

First, The persons to whom a Divine revelation is immediately made, what assurance they can have of it. And,

Secondly, What assurance other persons can have of it. I say these are distinctly to be considered, because there is a very different account to be given of them.

First, As to those persons to whom the revelation is immediately made, the question is, by what arguments or means they may come to be assured, that any revelation which they have, is really and truly such, and not a delusion or imposture. The Jewish doctors tell us, that some kind of Divine revelations do not carry full assurance along with them that they are Divine; such are dreams and visions, as they are distinguished from prophecy: and as to that kind of revelation, which they strictly

call prophecy, they give several characteristical notes to distinguish true Divine revelation from delusion; such as these—that the spirit of delusion only works upon the imagination, and the lower faculties; the Divine spirit of prophecy upon the understanding and reasonable part of the soul: that delusive inspirations were accompanied with alienation of mind, which did discover itself either in rage and fury, or melancholy; but the true prophetical spirit is always consistent with the use of reason and understanding. They distinguish them likewise by the manner of their seizing upon them; that in the beginning of inspirations the prophets use to have some apparition, or to hear some voice, either articulate in words, or inarticulate by thunder, or the sound of a trumpet, which in the Revelations doth frequently precede St. John's visions; and by these they were assured that they were Divine. And, lastly, that a Divine inspiration did always carry along with it a strong evidence of its original, and that by the vigour and strength of its impression, they were fully assured and satisfied beyond all doubt and hesitation: thus they. But all that I shall say by way of answer to this question, shall be in these two propositions:

1. If we believe any such thing as Divine revelation, we cannot doubt but those who have it are some way or other fully satisfied of it. The reason is evident; because otherwise it would be in vain, and to no purpose, and could not possibly attain its end. A Divine revelation cannot possibly signify any thing, or in reason have any effect upon a man, unless he be satisfied it is such: for so long as he does not know but that it is a delusion, he will not attend to it, or regard it. So that the dis-

tinction of the Jewish doctors between dreams and visions, and prophecy, that this carries always full assurance with it, the other not, is vain and unreasonable.

2. The means whereby this assurance of a Divine revelation is wrought, is most probably the evidence it carries along with it, whereby it did fully satisfy the person that had it of its Divine original. That God can accompany his own revelations with such a clear and overpowering light as shall discover to us the divinity of them, and satisfy us beyond all doubt and scruple, I think no man can doubt, that considers the vast power and influence which he must needs have over our understandings who made them, and knows the frame of them: and if this be granted, it is not necessary to explain the particular way how it is done, it being a thing not to be expressed in words, but to be felt and experienced. So that the argument, whereby this persuasion of a Divine revelation is wrought in those that have it, is inward experience of the full satisfaction and assurance, which they find to be supernaturally wrought in them; that is, of which they can give no account from themselves. And this is not a stubborn belief, and an obstinate conceit of a thing: but a good man, who is inspired, when he reflects upon himself, and this assurance which he finds in himself, he can give a rational account of it to himself. Thus he finds that it is a foreign impression, and doth not spring from himself, nor hath its rise from thence; therefore he ascribes it to some spirit without himself; and he believes that there is a God that can communicate himself to the minds and spirits of men: and that his goodness is such, that he will not suffer them to be under

a necessity of delusion, which they must be, if, when they have the highest assurance and satisfaction, that such a thing is a Divine revelation, they may be deceived. And then likewise he considers the matter of the revelation, which if it do not contradict any essential and necessary fundamental notion of his understanding, he thinks himself bound to entertain it upon this assurance.

I say, good men may give themselves this rational satisfaction: for I grant a wicked man, that rejects and disobeys the truth of God, may so provoke him, as "to give him up to strong delusions, to believe lies;" and he may be as confident of a lie, as a good man is of truth. But as this is not unjust from God in reference to the persons, so it is no prejudice to the assurance which good men may have of Divine revelation.

And this assurance is such, as it is not in the power of any evil spirit to convey to us, concerning a delusion; or if it be in his power, he is not permitted to do it to any who have not highly provoked God, by rejecting the truth, "to give them up to strong delusions, to believe lies:" and that such persons should be obnoxious to such delusions, as it is not unjust in reference to them, so neither is it any prejudice to the assurance which good men may have of such revelations which are truly and really Divine.

But for the other ways of discerning true revelation from false, which the Jews mention; as, that the Spirit of God always works upon the understanding, as well as the imagination, and in consequence with the use of reason and understanding, and gives some sensible notice of its seizing upon men, I think all these to be uncertain if they be ex-

amined. And if the last which they mention, viz. this that I have insisted upon, be true, all the other are superfluous. For what need of any other sign to assure a man that that is a Divine revelation, which carries along with it a clear satisfaction and full assurance that it is such?

So that it remains now, that we fix upon some particular ways where by the person that hath a Divine revelation may be assured of it; and this I shall do by these propositions.

First, That God can work in the mind of man a firm persuasion of a thing, by giving him a clear and vigorous perception of it; and if so, then God can accompany his own revelations with such a clear and overpowering light, as shall discover to us the divinity of them, and satisfy us thereof beyond all doubt and scruple. And this no man can doubt of, that considers the vast power and influence which God, who made the soul of man, and perfectly knows the frame of it, must needs have upon the mind and understanding of man.

Secondly, God never persuades a man of any thing that contradicts the natural and essential notions of his mind and understanding. For this would be to destroy his own workmanship, and to impose that upon the understanding of a man, which, whilst it retains its own nature, and remains what it is, it cannot possibly admit. For instance: we cannot imagine that God can persuade any man that there is no God; for he that believes any thing as from God, must necessarily believe there is a God; therefore it is impossible that he can be persuaded of this as from God, that there is no God; and that he is not wise and just, and good and powerful; and that he is not to be honoured and

loved by all reasonable creatures: because these do clearly and immediately contradict the most essential and fundamental notions of our minds concerning God, and the respect which is due to him: not only because it is unworthy of God to go about to persuade a man of a falsehood; but because it is impossible in the nature of the thing, that the mind of man, which is naturally prepossessed with contrary notions, should, whilst it retains its own nature, admit of such as do clearly and immediately contradict them. For if these be natural notions, that there is a God, that he must be wise and just and good and powerful, and ought to be honoured and loved by his creatures; the mind of man cannot possibly admit of any contrary persuasions and impressions: for the former persuasions being natural to us, will always remain while our nature remains, and if any persuasions contrary to these could be wrought upon our minds, they would signify nothing, but would mutually destroy one another. For if any man that is persuaded that God is good, (as every man is, that is persuaded he is at all) could, during the persuasion, be likewise of a contrary persuasion, that he is not good; this latter persuasion would signify nothing: for he is not persuaded that God is not good, whilst he retains this persuasion that he is good.

Thirdly, Supposing the thing revealed do not contradict the essential notions of our minds, no good and holy man hath reason to doubt of any thing, whether it be a revelation from God or not, of which he hath a clear and vigorous perception, and full satisfaction in his own mind that it is such. For if a man may have reason to doubt of any thing, whereof he hath a clear perception, then no man can

be certain of any thing. Now that there is such a thing as certainty, is now supposed and not to be proved. I say, a good and holy man can have no reason to doubt: for a wicked man (I grant) may, by a sinful rejection of, and disobedience to, the truth, so far provoke God, as "to give him up to strong delusions to believe lies;" and he may be as confident of a lie, as any good man is of the truth.

And as this is not unjust from God in reference to wicked men, so it is no prejudice to the assurance which good men may have concerning a Divine revelation.

Fourthly, A good and holy man reflecting upon this assurance and persuasion that he hath, may be able to give himself a reasonable account of it, and satisfy himself that it is not a stubborn belief and an obstinate conceit of things without any ground or reason. A good man is secretly and within himself persuaded, that God hath revealed to him such a thing; reflecting upon this persuasion, he finds that it is a foreign impression, and doth not spring from his own mind: how he believing that there is a God, who can, and probably doth communicate and reveal himself to the minds of good men; and being withal satisfied that his goodness is such, that he will not suffer good men, who do heartily and sincerely desire to know his will, to be under a necessity of delusion, (which they unavoidably are, if they may then be deceived, when they have the greatest assurance and clearest satisfaction that such a thing is revealed to them of God;) from hence he reasonably concludes, that he ought not to question the matter any farther. I might instance in the revelation made to Abraham, concerning the

sacrificing his son, which hath the greatest difficulty in it of any case I know of: but of that I have elsewhere discoursed at large.* Thus much for the first.

Secondly, What assurance can other persons, who have not the revelation immediately made to them, have of a Divine revelation? To this I shall answer by these propositions:

1. That there are some means whereby a man may be assured of another's revelation that it is Divine. For,

(1.) Otherwise it would signify nothing, but only to the person that immediately had it; which would make void the chief end of most revelations, which are seldom made to particular persons for their own sakes only, but, for the most part, on purpose that they may be made known to others, which could not effectually be done, unless there be some means whereby men may be assured of revelations made to another.

(2.) None could be guilty of unbelief but those who had immediate revelation made to them. For no man is guilty of unbelief that is not obliged to believe: but no man can be under any obligation to believe any thing, who hath not sufficient means whereby he may be assured that such a thing is true.

2. The private assurance and satisfaction of another concerning a revelation made to him, can signify nothing at all to me, to assure me of it. For what satisfaction is it to me, that another may say, he hath a revelation, unless I have some means to be assured that what he saith is true? For if I

* See Sermon LVI. vol. iv. p. 26.

must believe every spirit, that is, every man that says he is inspired, I lie open to all possible impostures and delusions, and must believe every one that either foolishly conceits, or falsely pretends, that he hath a revelation: for both the conceited and pretended enthusiast will say they have revelations, with as much confidence as those who are truly and divinely inspired: and to take every man's word in matters of such huge consequence and importance as revelation from God ought to be presumed to be, would not be faith, but credulity, that is, an ungrounded persuasion; which how severely God punished, you may see in that famous instance, (1 Kings xiii.) where the prophet that was sent to Bethel, is upon his return torn in pieces by a lion, because of his credulity and easy belief of a pretended revelation. I confess this case is somewhat different from theirs who simply believe a pretended revelation, as being complicated with some other aggravating circumstances. For he had an immediate revelation from God, "not to eat, nor drink at Bethel; nor to return the same way that he came:" upon his return an old prophet meets him, and tells him that an angel had appeared to him, and had bid him to bring him back, and to cause him to eat and drink; he believes him, and turns in with him. Now this was the aggravation of his credulity—that when he himself had had an express revelation from God, concerning which he was satisfied, he hearkened to the pretended revelation of another, concerning which he had no assurance, in contradiction to a Divine revelation, which he knew to be such. Not but that the command which God had given him was in its own nature revokable, and God might have countermanded it by another immediate revelation to him, or by an

equivalent, that is, a miracle wrought by the prophet who pretended to countermand it from God; *Unumquodque dissolvitur eo modo qui ligatur*, the obligation which was brought upon him by an immediate revelation, could not be dissolved but by another immediate revelation, or evidence equivalent to it. However, this instance serves in the general to my purpose, that a man may be faulty by credulity as well as by unbelief: and as a man ought not to disbelieve where there is sufficient evidence; so neither ought he to believe any thing without sufficient grounds of assurance.

3. That miracles wrought for the confirmation of any Divine testimony or revelation made to another, are a sufficient means, whereby those who have not the Divine revelation immediately made to them, may be assured that it is Divine; I say, these are sufficient means of assurance in this case. I do not say they are the only means (for it does not become men to limit the power and wisdom of God), but I do not know of any other means of assurance upon which men can securely rely; and it is a great presumption that this is the best and fittest, if not the only means, because the wisdom of God has always pitched upon it, and constantly made use of it, and no other. Under miracles I comprehend the prediction of future events, which God claims as a peculiar prerogative to himself, because such things are out of the reach of any created understanding; and therefore in the prophet Isaiah he challengeth the idols of the heathens to give this testimony, or argument of their divinity; "Shew us things that are to come, that we may know that ye are gods."

But here we must distinguish between doubtful and unquestionable miracles. I call those doubtful

miracles, which, though a man cannot tell how they can be done by any natural power, yet do not carry that full conviction with them, as to be universally owned and acknowledged for arguments of a Divine power. Such were those which the magicians did by their enchantments. I call those unquestionable, which, considering their quality and number, and the public manner of doing them, are out of all question. Such were the miracles of Moses, and our Saviour. Now a doubtful, and a single, and a private wonder, or miracle, as I may call it, can give no confirmation to any thing, in opposition to a revelation, or a doctrine, confirmed by many, and public and unquestionable miracles.

Upon this account Moses forbids the children of Israel to hearken to any prophet that should come to seduce them to idolatry; yea, though he should give a sign or wonder, and the "sign or wonder should come to pass," (Deut. xiii. 1—4.) Now here lies the strength of the reason, "Because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage;" that is, because he contradicts the great revelation which God made of himself, and confirmed by such a succession of so many, and so great miracles; the credit of which revelation ought not in reason to be called in question upon the working of a single and a private wonder, which we could not distinguish from a miracle. Upon the same account St. Paul (Gal. i. 8.) says, "Though an angel from heaven should preach any other doctrine than that which had been preached unto them, he should be accursed;" that is, after so clear and great confirma-

tion, as was given to the gospel, a contrary doctrine, though it should come from an angel, should be rejected as execrable.

But you will say, Suppose such a prophet as Moses speaks of here, such an angel as St. Paul mentions, should work as many and as great miracles as Moses and Christ wrought, should we then believe them?

I answer; This is not to be supposed: for supposing the providence of God in the world, it cannot be imagined that an equal attestation should be given to a false doctrine and a true. But that the greatest and most unquestionable miracles are to carry it, is evident; because this is all the reason why Moses was to be credited above the magicians, because he wrought more and greater wonders than they did. But if it could be supposed, that any one could work as great miracles for the confirmation of idolatry, as were wrought by way of attestation to the true worship of God, then there would be no difference, but what the reason of the thing makes; the belief of one God being more reasonable than many; and not to make an image or sensible representation of a spirit, being more reasonable than to make one. But if this could be supposed, the natural issue and consequence of it would be atheism; a man would believe neither that nor the other, nor that there is any God at all.

But a farther account of the nature and difference of miracles, I reserve to some * particular discourses on that subject. At present, for the fuller opening of this matter, it will be proper to shew,—

* See Sermons CCXXVIII. &c. on Heb. ii. 4. in this volume.

1. That the Divine authority both of the doctrine of Moses and Christ is resolved into miracles.

2. What assurance of miracles is sufficient to persuade men to believe that testimony, for the confirmation of which they are wrought.

3. What assurance they give us, that the Scriptures are a Divine revelation.

But the consideration of these I refer to the next opportunity.

SERMON CCXXI.

OF THE FAITH OR PERSUASION OF A DIVINE REVELATION.

But without faith it is impossible to please God.—HEB. xi. 6.

IN discoursing of the faith or persuasion of a Divine revelation, I proposed the considering these seven things:

I. What we understand by a Divine revelation.

II. The several kinds of it.

III. Whether a persuasion concerning a Divine revelation be properly faith.

IV. How we may come to be assured of a Divine revelation; or by what arguments a faith or persuasion of a Divine revelation is wrought in us.

V. The degrees of this persuasion or assurance.

VI. The effects of it.

VII. In what sense it may be said to be a Divine faith.

I was upon the fourth of these, viz. considering by what arguments a faith or persuasion of a Divine revelation is wrought in us; which led me to consider the evidence of miracles; and I proposed to shew particularly these three things:

1. That the Divine authority both of the doctrine of Moses and Christ is resolved into miracles.

2. What assurance of miracles is sufficient to persuade men to believe that testimony, for the confirmation of which they are wrought.

3. What assurance they give us that the Scriptures are a Divine revelation.

I proceed to treat of these in their order.

1. I shall shew that the Divine authority both of the doctrine of Moses and of Christ, is resolved into miracles. We find the Scripture lays the whole weight of the Divine authority, both of the law and gospel, of the revelation of the Old and New Testament, upon this evidence. (Exod. iv. 1—3.) When God sends Moses, he objects, "that they will not believe him, nor hearken to him, but will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto him." Thereupon God gives him a power of miracles, that they may believe "that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hath appeared unto him;" and by the evidence of those miracles which he wrought, he prevailed over the magicians. And generally, throughout the story of the Old Testament, we find all persons yielding to the evidence of miracles, as a sufficient attestation to a prophet and his message. When Elijah had prevailed with God in a miraculous manner to confirm his own worship, and confute the worship of Baal, by sending fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice, the people yield to this evidence, and cry out, "The Lord he is God, the Lord he is God," (1 Kings xviii. 39.) When Elijah raised the woman's son, then she owned him for a prophet; (1 Kings xvii. 24.) "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is true." So likewise Naaman was convinced by the miraculous cure which the prophet Elisha wrought on him: (2 Kings v. 15.) "Behold! now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel."

And so likewise the divinity of our Saviour and his doctrine is resolved into the evidence of his miracles. This is the evidence Christ gives of himself, when John sent his disciples to inquire whether he was the Messias; (Matt. xi. 2.) "Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." So John v. 36. "But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." (Chap. x. 25.) "Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed it not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." (Ver. 37, 38.) "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him." (Chap. xiv. 11.) "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." (Chap. xx. 30, 31.) "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through his name." And from hence our Saviour aggravates the unbelief, and the impenitency of the Jews, because they

resisted this highest evidence: (Matt. xi. 20—24.) "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin; woe unto thee, Bethsaida: for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell. For if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." (John xv. 24.) "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." And so the apostle tells us, that miracles are the great confirmation of the gospel, and are so clear an evidence of the truth of it, that they render all unbelievers inexcusable: (Heb. ii. 2, 3.) "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?"

In particular, the great weight of the gospel is laid upon the miracle of Christ's resurrection from the dead, which our Saviour mentions as the "only sign that should be given to that generation," that is, the clearest. And the apostle (Rom. i. 4.) saith, that "he was declared to be the Son of God, with

power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." This puts it out of all question. And St. Paul, in his sermon to the Athenians, (Acts xvii. 30, 31.) insists upon this as the great evidence; "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." And this was the proper work of the apostles, to be witnesses to the world of this great miracle: (Acts i. 21, 22.) "Wherefore, of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." So St. Peter, in his sermon, (Acts ii. 32.) "Him hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses." And to mention no more, (Acts x. 38—41.) "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead."

2. What assurance of miracles is sufficient to persuade men to believe the revelation or testimony, for the confirmation of which they are wrought.

Of this assurance there are three degrees, all which do oblige men to believe the Divine revelation for which they are wrought.

(1.) If we have the evidence of our own senses for it, that is, if we see them wrought. This evidence the disciples of our Lord had, and the Jews, and therefore their unbelief was inexcusable; and the blaspheming the Spirit whereby they saw such miracles to be wrought, was the sin against the Holy Ghost.

(2.) If we have the credible report of eye-witnesses of those miracles, who are credible persons, and we have no reason to doubt of their testimony; that is, if we have the report of them immediately from the mouth of those who were eye-witnesses of them. That this lays likewise an obligation on men to believe, appears by our Saviour's reproof of Thomas, who would not believe except he himself saw: but most expressly from that text, (Mark xvi. 14.) "He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen."

(3.) If the credible report of eye-witnesses concerning such miracles be conveyed to us in such a manner, and with so much evidence, as we have no reason to doubt of it. For why should we not believe a credible report conveyed to us in such a manner, as we have no reason to question, but that it hath been faithfully conveyed and transmitted to us? St. John thought this to be assurance sufficient to induce belief: (John xx. 31.) "But these things were written that ye might believe," &c. And this is that assurance which we, who live at this distance from the age of Christ and his apostles, have of the miracles wrought in confirmation of the

gospel. I shall have occasion to enlarge upon these heads hereafter.

3. What assurance miracles give us, that the Scriptures are a Divine revelation. And this contains four distinct questions in it.

(1.) What assurance we have from hence, that the doctrine contained in the Scripture is from God? To which the answer is easy; because these miracles were wrought for the confirmation of this doctrine.

(2.) The question is, What assurance the miracles give us, that those persons who are said to be the penmen of the several books of Scripture, were really so? To this I answer: None at all: for I do not know of any miracle that was wrought to prove Moses wrote the Pentateuch, or that St. Matthew wrote the Gospel which goes under his name. But if the question be, How then am I assured of this? I answer, by credible and uncontrolled report. It bears his name; and hath always been received for his: and if this will not satisfy, I cannot prove it farther; it is too late now to prove it by any other argument. St. Matthew is dead, and those who saw him write it, and those who received it from them; so that we cannot go to inquire of them in order to our satisfaction: but the best of it is, that as it cannot now be proved at this distance otherwise than by constant and uncontrolled report; so no man at this distance can have any reason to doubt of it; and so long as no man can have reason to doubt of it, there can be no need of proving it; especially considering, that it is by no means necessary to salvation, to believe that St. Matthew wrote the history of the gospel; but only to believe what he wrote.

(3.) The question is, What assurance miracles give,

that those persons who are said to be the penmen of the books of Scripture were divinely inspired? The miracles (under which I comprehend the prediction of future events) which Moses and the prophets and the apostles wrought, were testimonies from heaven, that they were Divine persons, and that what they said was to be credited, and consequently if they gave out themselves for such, that they were such. That the penmen of the New Testament were persons endued with a miraculous power, is plain, because they were most of them apostles: and for the rest we have no reason to doubt of it; those extraordinary gifts being so common in the primitive times: however, so long as there is nothing in the rest, that is dissonant from, or contrary to, what those wrote, of whose inspirations we are assured, and these their writings have always been received in the church as of Divine inspiration, which we may well presume was not rashly done, and without grounds, we have no reason to doubt as to them: or if they were, so long as they contain nothing that is contrary to those who were unquestionably inspired, the matter is of no dangerous consequence. And as for the penmen of the Old Testament, we are assured that they were all inspired, by one in the New Testament, that was unquestionably so; St. Paul, who tells us, "That all Scripture is of Divine inspiration," meaning the books of the Old Testament which were called by that name, κατ' ἐξοχήν, or by way of eminency.

But if any one inquire farther, how far the penmen of Scripture were inspired in the writing of those books? whether only so far as to be secured from mistake in the delivery of any message or

doctrine from God, or in the relation of any history, or matter of fact; yet so, as they were left every man to his own style and manner of expression? or that every thing they wrote was immediately dictated to them, and that not only the sense of it, but the very words and phrases by which they express things, and that they were merely instruments or penmen—I shall not take upon me to determine; I shall only say this in general, that considering the end of this inspiration, which was to inform the world certainly of the mind and will of God, it is necessary for every man to believe that the inspired penmen of Scripture were so far assisted as was necessary to this end: and he that thinks upon good grounds that this end cannot be secured, unless every word and syllable were immediately dictated, he hath reason to believe it was so; but if any man upon good grounds thinks the end of writing the Scripture may be sufficiently secured without that, he hath no reason to conclude, that God, who is not wanting in what is necessary, is guilty of doing what is superfluous. And if any man is of opinion, that Moses might write the history of those actions which he himself did or was present at, without an immediate revelation of them; or that Solomon by his natural and acquired wisdom might speak those wise sayings which are in his Proverbs; or the evangelists might write what they heard and saw, or what they had good assurance of from others, as St. Luke tells he did; or that St. Paul might write for his cloak and parchments at Troas, and salute by name his friends and brethren, or that he might advise Timothy to drink a little wine, &c. without the immediate dictate of the Spirit of God—he seems to have reason on his side. For that men may,

without an immediate revelation, write those things which they think without a revelation, seems very plain. And that they did so, there is this probable argument for it, because we find that the evangelists in relating the discourses of Christ, are very far from agreeing in the particular expressions and words, though they do agree in the substance of the discourses: but if the words had been dictated by the Spirit of God, they must have agreed in them. For when St. Luke differs from St. Matthew, in relating what our Saviour said, it is impossible that they should both relate it right as to the very words and form of expression; but they both relate the substance of what he said. And if it had been of concernment, that every thing that they wrote should be dictated *ad apicem*, to a tittle, by the Spirit of God, it is of the same concernment still, that the providence of God should have secured the Scriptures since to a tittle from the least alteration: which, that it is not done, appears by the various readings both of the Old and New Testament, concerning which, no man can infallibly say, that this is right, and not the other. It seems sufficient in this matter to assert, that the Spirit of God did reveal to the penmen of the Scriptures what was necessary to be revealed: and as to all other things, that he did superintend them in the writing of it, so far as to secure them from any material error or mistake in what they have delivered. Or,

4. If the question be, What assurance we have from miracles, that all those books which we receive are canonical? To this I answer, I do not know of any miracle that was ever written on purpose to confirm the canon of the Scriptures: but as for the books of the Old Testament, we have suffi-

cient assurance, that those which we now receive, are those which the Jews received for such in our Saviour's time; and he doth not any where find fault with any of them as not canonical, which we have no reason to doubt but he would have done, if any one of them had been otherwise. And that these are the same the Jews then received, appears sufficiently, because both Jews and Christians to this day agree in them. And as for the books of the New Testament, we are sufficiently assured, that these and no other are the books which the ancient church received for canonical and of Divine authority, and though some of them were for a time controverted, yet upon farther inquiry and examination they were received.

V. Whether this faith concerning a Divine revelation made to others, do admit of degrees? That it doth, is evident from these expressions which the Scripture useth, of "increasing faith," of "growing in it," of "a weak and strong faith," all which plainly supposeth degrees. And that these degrees of faith which the Scripture speaks of, are to be understood of a higher and lower degree of assurance concerning a Divine revelation as such, and concerning the things revealed, I shewed before. For all the doubts which the disciples had concerning what our Saviour taught, did resolve itself into this—whether he was the Messias, and sent by God to teach those things; which, had they been fully satisfied of, they could have made no doubt of any thing that he taught.

And here it will be proper to inquire, what is the highest degree of assurance which we can have concerning a Divine revelation made to another, that it is such; whether it be an infallible assurance, or

only an undoubted certainty. The difference between them is this: an infallible assurance is such as excludes all possibility of error and mistake; an undoubted certainty doth not exclude all possibility of mistake, but only all just and reasonable cause why a prudent and considerate man should doubt. And the reason why I make this inquiry, is, in order to be satisfied of a clear and firm way for the resolution of our faith, against the papists, who say it is impossible for us to give any satisfactory account of our faith, because we do finally resolve it into fallible grounds, and consequently our faith must be fallible, and consequently cannot be Divine, because all Divine faith is infallible; for, say they, when we inquire why you believe the doctrines of Christian religion; you say, upon Divine authority, or the revelation of God in Scripture. This is granted to be an infallible ground, if we can be infallibly assured that the Scriptures are a Divine revelation; therefore they inquire in the second place, Why do you believe the Scriptures to be a Divine revelation? We say, because the persons who delivered the doctrines contained in them, had the greatest attestation from God, that they were employed by him, to reveal and make known his mind; and this attestation was miracles. But then they ask, What assurance have you that such miracles were wrought? Have you an infallible assurance, or not? If not, then it cannot be a sufficient ground for a Divine faith, which is always infallible. In opposition therefore to them, I shall not now attempt to shew the insufficiency of their way of resolving faith; but vindicate ours as sufficient, by laying down and proving, if I can, these propositions:—

1. That infallibility is not essential to Divine faith, and necessarily included in the notion of it: which I prove thus. Divine faith admits of degrees, as I have shewed before: but there can be no degree of infallibility. Infallibility is an impossibility of being deceived; but there are no degrees of impossibility, one thing is not more impossible than another: but all things that are impossible, are equally so.

2. That the assurance which we have of the miracles wrought for the confirmation of the gospel, is not an infallible assurance. I shewed before, that there are three ways whereby we may be assured of matter of fact, such as the working of miracles is.

First, By our own senses.

Secondly, By the report of credible witnesses.

Thirdly, By credible history. But none of these ways give us infallible assurance. That it is possible our senses may deceive us, I think nobody will deny; and if so, then the testimony of witnesses, and the report of history, which likewise depends originally upon our senses, may deceive us. I do not know a fourth way whereby we may be assured of matter of fact.

3. That an undoubted assurance of a Divine revelation, that it is such, is as much as in reason can be expected. I deny not, but that a Divine revelation is an infallible ground of faith; because whatever God says is infallibly true, and a faith built upon a Divine revelation would be infallible, if we could be infallibly assured that it is a Divine revelation; but that we cannot be without another Divine revelation to assure us infallibly that this is one, and that other would require a third, and so without end; which being absurd and unreasonable,

it remains that an infallible assurance of a Divine revelation is impossible; and consequently, that we can have no more than an undoubted assurance; and this is as much as in reason we can expect to have; for it is unreasonable to expect that we should have any greater assurance that such a revelation is from God, than we have that there is a God, because that there is a God, is the first and most fundamental principle in religion, and it is unreasonable to expect greater assurance of any thing in religion, than we have of that which is the first principle of it. And indeed it is impossible; for no man can be infallibly assured, that a revelation is from God, unless he be first infallibly assured, that there is a God, but no man hath more than undoubted assurance that there is a God. No man pretends to a Divine revelation that there is a God; but only to have rational satisfaction of it, such as leaves no just or reasonable cause to doubt of it. And why then should any desire greater assurance of a Divine revelation, than he hath of a God?

4. An undoubted assurance is sufficient to constitute a Divine faith. Mark xvi. 14, it is said, Christ upbraided his disciples with their unbelief; because they believed not on them, who had seen him after he was risen. Suppose now the disciples had believed, which they ought to have done, this faith of theirs would have been a truly Divine faith; but by no means infallible. For that cannot be an infallible faith which is built but upon fallible grounds: now the ground upon which they ought to have believed, was the report of credible witnesses; but the report of credible witnesses is by no means infallible: it is indeed undoubted, for I have no reason to doubt of a credible report; for that is credible which

I have just cause to believe; but I can have no just cause to doubt of that which I have just cause to believe.

As an undoubted assurance is sufficient to constitute a Divine faith, so it is sufficient to all the ends and purposes of a Divine faith. To instance in the faith of the promises of eternal life. What is the end and design of this faith, but to encourage our obedience, and make us continue in it, notwithstanding the hazard of any thing in this world? Now I say, an undoubted assurance is abundantly sufficient to this end. Do not men venture their estates in traffic to places they never saw, because they have it from credible persons, that there are such places, and they have no reason to doubt their testimony: and why should not the same assurance serve in greater matters; if an undoubted assurance of a lesser benefit and advantage will make men venture as much? Why should any man desire greater assurance of any thing than to have no just reason to doubt of it; why more than so much as the thing is capable of? I cannot possibly understand why every man should not be contented with sufficient assurance, or for what reason a man should desire more than enough; and why a man should not be satisfied that a thing is so, when he hath as great assurance of it, and as good evidence for it, as he could have, supposing it were.

And for men to say, Nothing less than infallible assurance can satisfy a man's mind, that men will always doubt so long as there is a possibility of the contrary; and there will be a possibility of the contrary, until we have infallible assurance, is as unreasonable as can be imagined. I ask any man whether he be infallibly assured that there was such

a man as William the Conqueror? or that there is such a country as Spain? If he say he is, I ask where is his infallible evidence for this? He will cite several historians; but all this is human testimony, and that is fallible. It seems then he is not infallibly certain there was such a man, or there is such a country; and consequently there is a possibility of the contrary. It is granted there is: but is any sober man unsatisfied in his mind about these things? I would fain meet with the man that will tell me in good earnest, that he hath reason to doubt, whether there was such a man or not; and whether there be such a place as Spain or not? So that it is fond for any man to allege a bare possibility of the contrary, as a reasonable cause of doubting concerning any thing, for which we have as good evidence as the thing is capable of.

Upon these grounds we can easily resolve our faith. We believe the doctrine of Christian religion, because it is revealed by God; we believe it to be revealed by God, because it was confirmed by unquestionable miracles: we believe such miracles were wrought, because we have as great assurance of this, as any matter of fact, at such a distance from the time it was done, is capable of. Now if the papists say, this doth at last amount to no more than moral assurance; I grant it doth not: but then I have proved this assurance to be as much as in reason can be expected, and as much as is sufficient to the nature and ends of a Divine faith, and that an infallible assurance is not agreeable to a human understanding; but an incommunicable attribute and prerogative of the Divine nature, which whoever pretends to, he hath not the modesty of a creature, but doth by a sacrilegious ambition attempt the

throne of God, and equal himself to the Most High. And, therefore, it is no wonder that the popes of Rome, after they had once assumed to themselves to be infallible, did presently arrogate to themselves the titles of God, there being such strict connexion between the attribute of infallibility, and the Divine nature, that whoever challengeth the first, may with equal reason claim the other.

I shall only add this: that nothing hath been more pernicious to Christian religion, than the vain pretences of men to greater assurance concerning things relating to it, than they can make good; the mischief of which is this—that when discerning and inquisitive men find that men pretend to greater matters than they can prove, this makes them doubt of all they say, and to call in question the truth of Christianity itself. Whereas if men would be contented to speak justly of things, and pretend to no greater assurance than they can bring evidence for, considerate men would be apt to believe them. Every knowing man being more ready to listen to a modest man, whose confidence bears a proportion to the reason and arguments he brings for what he says, than to a confident pretender, who calls every weak saying a demonstration. And, indeed, such men are but justly dealt withal, since the experience of the world hath sufficiently taught us, that usually those who speak modestly of things, are furnished with the best arguments for their assertions; and that those who have made the strongest pretences to infallibility in any thing, have the weakest reasons for what they have said; of which this account may be given, that good reasons and arguments are requisite to beget in men a rational assurance; but

a strong conceit is sufficient to beget in men an opinion of infallibility.

VI. What is the proper and genuine effect of this faith of a Divine revelation? I answer, A compliance with the design and intention of it.

VII. In what respect this may be called a Divine faith? To this I answer, Not only in respect of the object of it, and the argument whereby it is wrought, and the effect of it: but, likewise, in respect of the author and efficient of it, which is the Divine Spirit. And here, if time would permit, I should speak of the testimony of the Spirit; not as an argument whereby a persuasion of a Divine revelation, viz. that the Scriptures are the word of God, is wrought; but, also, as he is the author and efficient cause of it. I do most readily grant the great influence that the Spirit of God hath upon the minds of men in this work of faith, as well as in every spiritual act: but it is to be inquired, how the Spirit of God may be said to work this faith in us; whether by strengthening the faculty, or by holding the mind intent upon the argument, whereby this persuasion is wrought; or discovering the object, or removing the impediments, or furthering and helping forward the efficacy of it upon our hearts and lives. But of this, God willing, in my next discourse.

SERMON CCXXII.

OF THE TESTIMONY OF THE SPIRIT, TO THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL.

But without faith it is impossible to please God.—HEB. xi. 6.

IN discoursing of the faith or persuasion of a Divine revelation, I came to inquire, in what respects this may be called a Divine faith. To which my answer was, that it is a Divine faith, not only with respect to the object of it, and the argument whereby it is wrought, and the effect of it; but likewise in respect of the author and efficient of it, which is the Divine Spirit. I proceed, therefore, to consider the testimony of the Divine Spirit, not only as an argument whereby a persuasion of a Divine revelation, viz. that the Scriptures are the word of God, is wrought; but also, as he is the author and efficient cause of it. The Scripture doth, in a peculiar manner, ascribe the belief of a Divine revelation, especially of the revelation of the gospel, to the Spirit of God. In this sense the Scripture saith, that "no man can say that Jesus is the Christ, but by the Spirit of God." And though every good persuasion that we have, be, in some sort or other, to be ascribed to God, yet I observe it to be the phrase of the New Testament, to attribute the belief of the gospel, in a more peculiar manner, to the Spirit of God. When any man believes the principles of natural religion, that there is a God, that the soul is immortal, and that there are rewards after this

life, as the heathens did; even this is from God, who hath planted these principles in our nature; or, which comes to all one, hath given us such faculties, by the use and improvement of which, we may come to the knowledge of these principles: but it is not usual, in the phrase of Scripture, to attribute this natural knowledge, in such a peculiar manner, to the Spirit of God.

When any man believes the matters of Divine revelation (for instance, the doctrines contained in the gospel), this faith is to be attributed to the Spirit of God; but not as immediately persuading us of the truth of these doctrines, but by persuading us, that the gospel, which contains these truths, is a Divine revelation; or, which is all one, that the Lord Jesus Christ, who delivered these doctrines to the world, was a Divine person, and came from God: and if we once firmly believe and entertain this, that Jesus was the Messias, and sent from God to acquaint the world with his mind and will, we can make no doubt of the truth of any thing which he hath delivered. So that the faith which the Scripture doth in a peculiar manuer attribute to the Spirit of God, is this persuasion, "that Jesus is the Christ;" that is, that he was the true Messias, and sent from God.

So that the question is—how the Spirit of God doth concur to the begetting of this faith or persuasion? Or, why this faith is in such a peculiar manner attributed to the Spirit of God?

I answer, Upon these two accounts:

First, In respect of the outward evidence which the Spirit of God gives us to persuade us to believe.

Secondly, In respect of the inward efficacy and operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men in believing.

First, In respect of the outward evidence which the Spirit of God gives us to persuade us to believe. And if this be not that which divines mean by the testimony of the Spirit in this matter, yet I think it is that which may most properly be so called. Now the Spirit of God did outwardly testify concerning Jesus, that he was the Messias, and came from God; and that the doctrine which he taught was Divine.

1. In the voice from heaven, which accompanied the descending of the Spirit upon him, in the form of a dove, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," (Matt. iii. 17.)

2. In those miracles which Christ himself wrought by the Spirit of God; which were so eminent a testimony of the Spirit of God, that the resisting of the evidence of those miracles, and the attributing of them to the devil, is by our Saviour called a blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and such a sin as shall never be pardoned: because miracles being the highest attestation that can be given to the divinity of any person or his doctrine, whoever resists this evidence, resists his last remedy; and such a person must needs remain in his infidelity, because there is nothing more that can be done for his conviction.

3. The third eminent testimony which the Holy Spirit gave to Christ, was in the great miracle of his resurrection from the dead; and hence it is that the great miracle of Christ's resurrection, which was the highest attestation to the divinity of his person, and the grand confirmation to his doctrine, is frequently in Scripture, in a most peculiar manner, ascribed to the Spirit of God. (Rom. i. 4.) "And was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness;" that is,

by those miracles which he wrought by the Holy Ghost, and by his resurrection from the dead. And so, (Rom. viii. 11.) "The Spirit of him that raised up Christ from the dead." (1 Pet. iii. 18.) "Being put to death in the flesh; but quickened by the Spirit."

4. In the effusion of the Spirit upon the apostles, who were to preach Christ and his doctrine to the world; and that it might carry its evidence along with it. God poured forth his Spirit upon those who were to be the publishers of it; by which Spirit they were endued with several miraculous powers and gifts, to convince the world of the truth of the doctrine which they preached. And with relation to this, I think, it is that the apostle saith, (1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.) "And my speech, and my preaching, was not with enticing words of man's wisdom: but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God;" that is, they did not use human eloquence to persuade men, but delivered the gospel with all plainness: and that which made those plain discourses so powerful, were those powerful demonstrations of the Divine Spirit, which appeared in those miraculous gifts wherewith they were endowed. I am sure Origen understands this text so. And so likewise the apostle (1 Thess. i. 5.) speaks to the same purpose, that "the gospel came not unto you in word only: but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;" that is, they did not only speak words to men, but the doctrine which they preached was attested in a powerful manner by the Holy Ghost, in those extraordinary gifts, which were bestowed upon them, which was a great evidence to their hearers, and

gave them great assurance of the truth of what they delivered. I think this is the meaning of those two places, but I will mention two others which are more unquestionable: (Acts v. 32.) where Peter and the rest of the apostles tell the high priests and their officers, what evidence they had for what they preached concerning the resurrection and ascension of Christ. "We are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey him." Not only they themselves had seen what they preached; but, to confirm their testimony, the Holy Ghost was poured forth upon them in miraculous gifts. And, (Heb. ii. 3, 4.) "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" So the Holy Ghost gave testimony to the truth of the doctrine which the apostles preached, by those gifts which he endowed them withal, and those miracles which he enabled them to work.

And I doubt not but with relation to the testimony which the Spirit of God gave to Christ by the miracles he wrought by Christ and his apostles; I say, I doubt not, but that with relation to his testimony it is, that the apostle saith, he was "justified in the Spirit:" (1 Tim. iii. 16.) "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit." That is, the miraculous power of the Spirit which appeared in him, and did accompany his doctrine, did justify him to the world, and vindicate him from being an impostor and deceiver.

From all which it appears, that the testimony which the Holy Spirit gives to Christ and his doctrine, was the miracles which he and his apostles wrought by the Spirit of God: and if we will take our forms of speaking from Scripture, this is that which may most properly be called the testimony of the Spirit to the truth of the gospel. But I deny not, but, besides this outward evidence, which the Spirit of God gives to the truth of the gospel, with respect to which the faith of the gospel is in a peculiar manner attributed to the Spirit of God, there is likewise an inward efficacy and operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men. Therefore,

Secondly, Faith is in a peculiar manner attributed to the Spirit of God, in respect of the inward efficacy and operation of the Divine Spirit upon the hearts and minds of those who sincerely and effectually believe and entertain the gospel; I say, who sincerely and effectually believe and entertain the gospel; that is, who so believe and entertain the gospel, as to obey it, and comply with it in their hearts and lives. For I doubt not but that there is so much evidence for the truth and Divine authority of the gospel, as is in itself sufficient, without any peculiar operation of the Spirit of God, to silence all opposers, and to convince them so far as that they cannot have any sufficient reason to disbelieve it: but withal, I do not think that this faith doth become an abiding and effectual persuasion in any person, without the special operation of the Holy Ghost. Now that the Spirit of God can work this effectual persuasion in the mind of man, cannot be doubted by any man who considers the vast power and influence which the Spirit of God, who made our souls, and knows the frame of them, can have upon the mind of man:

all the difficulty is about the manner of it; how this faith is wrought in us by the Spirit of God. Now although it were sufficient for us to know the thing, though we were ignorant of the manner how it is done, and we might very well rest satisfied in this; that the Spirit of God works this faith in us, though we did not know how he does it; yet, because many have taken upon them to state and determine the particular manner how it is done, it will be requisite, in order to the rectifying some mistakes about it, to inquire more particularly into this matter.

Now all the ways that have been assigned, or which, I think, we can easily imagine, may be reduced to one of these six heads. When we say the Spirit of God works faith in us, we must conceive it to be done some or all of these ways:

1. By strengthening the faculty, that is, raising and enabling our understanding to yield assent to the gospel. Or,

2. By enlightening and discovering the object, that is, the conclusion to be believed. Or,

3. By propounding to us the arguments, or evidence, whereby we may be persuaded of it. Or,

4. By holding our minds intent upon this evidence, till it have wrought its effect upon us. Or,

5. By removing the impediments which hinder our assent. Or,

6. By furthering and helping forward the efficacy of this persuasion upon our hearts and lives. That the Spirit can work faith in us, any, or all of these ways, so far as they are consistent with one another, I make not the least doubt. For what man, who believes the infinite power of the Divine Spirit, can make the least question, whether it can raise and

heighten our faculties above their natural and ordinary pitch? or, whether it can discover an object to us, with the greatest clearness and satisfaction? or, whether it can offer to our minds the best arguments, and the highest evidence, that a thing is capable of? or, whether it can hold our minds intent upon the consideration of any thing? or, whether it can remove all hinderances and impediments? or, whether it can make the persuasion of any truth effectual? No man, in reason, can doubt of the possibility of these. But the question is, what reason we have to assert this or that particular manner? and, what necessity and convenience there are from experience, or evidence of Scripture, so to do?

First of all, there seems no necessity of asserting the first; though I will not contend with any man that shall. For if this be true, that our understandings are naturally endowed with a sufficient power to assent to any truth that is sufficiently propounded to them; then there can be no necessity to assert, that the Spirit of God doth, in the work of faith, raise and elevate our understandings above their natural pitch. But I think it may easily be proved, that our understandings are naturally endowed with a sufficient power to assent to any truth that is sufficiently propounded to them; and that in such a case nothing hinders the assent of men, but their own perverseness and obstinacy, which usually proceeds from opposition of their lusts, or passions, or interest, to the truth which is propounded to them. For if men's understandings be not naturally endowed with a sufficient power to yield assent to the gospel, when it is sufficiently propounded to them, how can it be men's duty to

believe it? or, what justice can condemn them for unbelief? But though there be no necessity of asserting, that God doth always strengthen and elevate the understandings of those who believe; yet there is no reason to deny but that God may do this when he pleaseth, and possibly he often doth it.

God is said, in Scripture, to "enlighten the eyes of our understandings," which we may, if we please, understand in this sense; although that may be done by propounding such truths to us as we were ignorant of before, and could not have discovered, unless they had been revealed.

Secondly, The second way whereby the Spirit of God may be conceived to work faith in us, is by enlightening and discovering the object, or thing to be believed. In the case we are speaking of, the object or thing to be believed, is the gospel: now we may imagine the Spirit of God may work a faith or persuasion of this in us, by revealing or discovering to us this proposition, that the gospel is true. But this I need not speak much to, because I do not know any that pretend to have a particular and immediate revelation from God, that the gospel is true. So that though God may do this when he pleaseth, yet I do not know any who assert this to be the way whereby faith is wrought in men.

Thirdly, The Spirit of God may be conceived to work faith in us, by propounding and offering to us such arguments and evidence, as are apt to persuade us of the truth of the gospel. And this, the Spirit of God, which inspired the writers of the Scripture, doth mediately by the Scriptures, and those characters of divinity, which are in the doctrines contained in them; and by those miracles,

which are there credibly related to be wrought by the Spirit of God, for the confirmation of that doctrine. And besides this, the Spirit of God may, when he pleaseth, and probably often doth, immediately suggest those arguments to our minds, and bring them to our remembrance.

Fourthly, The Spirit of God may be conceived to work faith in us, by holding our minds intent upon this evidence, till it hath wrought its effect upon us. And this, I do not doubt, but the Spirit of God, out of his abundant grace and goodness to men, often doth; and I believe many men have found their minds kept intent upon such considerations, as have mightily prevailed upon them, and been effectual to persuade them to entertain and obey the gospel; and must acknowledge that their minds were awakened by such considerations, and made attentive to them, beyond their own inclinations to think upon such things; and in such a strange and unaccountable manner, as they cannot in reason but attribute to some superior influence, viz. to the Holy Spirit of God.

Fifthly, By removing the impediments which hinder our effectual assent to the gospel. And in this and the last particular, I conceive the work of the Spirit of God in the producing of faith, principally to consist: I say, in these principally, not absolutely excluding the former. The great impediment to the belief and entertainment of the gospel, is the prejudice which the minds of men are apt to conceive against it, either upon account of their education in a contrary religion, or upon account of their lusts, or some worldly interest to which the gospel is opposite. Now these are as so many bars upon the understandings of men, to keep

out the truth from entering into them. The prejudice of a contrary education, is a monstrous obstacle to religion. When men have believed otherwise from their youth, and have had contrary principles implanted in them in their tender years, and have all their lives been possessed with contrary apprehensions of things; the clearest truths that can be offered to them, come upon infinite disadvantage; their understandings are tinctured, and put false colours upon every thing that is represented to them. And this was the case of the Jews, when the Messias came: they were possessed with prejudices against his mean appearance, and had fashioned to themselves another kind of Messias, that should be a glorious temporal prince; and had been brought up in this apprehension; and this made them so invincibly obstinate against the reception of him; though the whole nation, when he came, were in expectation of him. And this was also the case of the gentiles, when the gospel was first preached to them; they had been educated in a contrary religion, and were possessed with quite other apprehensions, which made the passage of the gospel infinitely difficult. And I doubt not but that in the first publishing of the gospel, the Spirit did remarkably work upon the minds of men, for the removing of these prejudices, and thereby making way for the entertainment of the gospel. And though this prejudice be not now upon us in these parts of the world, who are brought up in the Christian religion; yet the lusts and interests of men are now great obstacles to the effectual entertainment of the gospel; and the Spirit of God doth many times eminently appear in the restraining and conquering the lusts of men, and removing

those other prejudices which hinder them from embracing the truth.

Sixthly, The last way whereby the Spirit of God may be said to work in us an effectual belief of the gospel, is by furthering and helping forward the efficacy of this persuasion upon our hearts and lives, in the first work of conversion and regeneration, and in the progressive work of sanctification afterward, both which the Scripture doth every where attribute to the Spirit of God, as the author and efficient cause. The faith which purifies the heart, and conquers the world, and works by love, hath this effect from the Spirit of God. Hence we are said to be "sanctified by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and the belief of the truth," and to "be kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation."

Thus I have shewn you, as briefly and clearly as I could, how the Spirit of God doth concur to the begetting of this Divine faith and persuasion in us, and consequently in what respects faith may be said to be the gift of God. I shall only draw two or three inferences from this discourse.

I. We may learn from hence to attribute all the good that is in us, or that we do in any kind, to God. Every good thing is from God; so St. James tells us, that "every good and perfect work comes down even from the Father of lights." Much more are we to ascribe to the free grace of God all the revelation of supernatural truth, which we cannot possibly come to the knowledge of, unless God of his free grace and goodness be pleased to discover it to us. And so likewise are we to ascribe to God, and the operation of his Holy Spirit upon our hearts, our belief of those truths, and assent to

them. Considering the corruption and degeneracy of human nature, and the opposition of the lusts and prejudices of men to Divine truth, we stand in need of the grace of God, and the operation of his Spirit upon our hearts, to bring us to a firm assent to the gospel; for as flesh and blood could not reveal these truths to us, so neither are they very apt to assent to them when they are revealed.

In the phrase of Scripture, all good is attributed to God; and all spiritual good to the Holy Spirit of God working in us, and assisting us to the doing of it. As, on the other hand, the Scripture attributes all those sins that are committed in the world to the influence of evil spirits. "He that committeth sin is of the devil." And though we do not know many times, how the Spirit of God worketh a good inclination in us, yet it is safe to follow the phrase of Scripture, and to ascribe all good to God, as in some way or other the author of it.

II. This doth not excuse the infidelity of men, that "faith is the gift of God." For though no man doth believe without some influence of the Divine Spirit upon his heart, yet this does by no means excuse those who believe not; any more than it is an excuse to the infidelity of men, that the Scripture attributes it to the devil, as in some sort the cause of it. He is said to "blind the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them." But the unbelief of men is a fault for all this; because the devil cannot blind our minds, unless we consent to it: he can only suggest false principles to us; but we may choose whether we will entertain them or not: he can only tempt us to reject the truth; but we may choose whether we will do so or not. In this we

are faulty, because we may resist the devil, and quench or repel those fiery darts which he casts into our minds; but if we will consent to his temptations, and suffer ourselves to be blinded by him, the fault of our unbelief is our own, as well as his; and we are guilty of the infidelity which we suffer him to tempt us to.

So, on the other hand, though "faith" be "the gift of God;" yet those that believe not are faulty upon this account, that they quench and resist the blessed motions of God's Spirit, and the influence and operation of the Spirit of God, which accompany the truth of the gospel to the minds of men, and produce their effect wherever they are not opposed and rejected by the prejudice and perverseness of men.

III. Let us depend upon God for every good gift, and earnestly beg the assistance and influence of his Holy Spirit, which is so necessary to us to beget faith in us, and to preserve and make it effectual upon our hearts and lives. Bread is not more necessary to the support of our natural life, than the Holy Spirit of God to our spiritual life.

For our encouragement to ask this gift, of God's Holy Spirit, our Saviour hath told us, that God is very ready to bestow it upon us. No father upon earth is more ready to give bread to his children that cry after him, than God is to give his Spirit to those that heartily and earnestly beg it of him. So our Saviour assures us: (Luke xi. 11—13.) "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your

children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

And now I have done with the first thing that I propounded, which was to open the nature of faith to you in general. I have been the longer upon this, because I thought it very material and important to the settling of right apprehensions in us concerning religion and Divine things; and I have all along endeavoured to make things as easy and plain as the nature of the subject would permit. And though probably many things that I have said, might not be within the full reach and comprehension of all capacities, yet, because I hoped they might be useful and beneficial to some at least, I could not think the other consideration a sufficient reason why I should wholly omit them, and pass them by; remembering what St. Paul says, that "he was a debtor to the wise," as well as the "unwise." And St. Peter tells us, that St. Paul in his Epistles wrote "many things which were hard to be understood" by some persons; yet, because those things might be of use to others, the Spirit of God did not think fit to omit the writing of them. What remains I shall reserve to another discourse, with which I shall conclude this subject.

SERMON CCXXIII.

THE EFFICACY, USEFULNESS, AND REASONABLENESS, OF DIVINE FAITH.

But without faith it is impossible to please God.—HEB. xi. 6.

IN discoursing on these words, I have dispatched the first thing which I proposed, viz. to give an account of the notion and nature of faith in general; under which I have largely treated of a religious or Divine faith in particular.

The second thing which I proposed, and to which I now proceed, is to confirm the truth of the proposition which I laid down from the words; viz. that faith is the great principle of religion. I told you that these words, "Without faith it is impossible to please God," do not only imply that faith is a necessary condition, without which men cannot be religious: but, likewise, that it is a cause and principle of religion. Without faith a man cannot be religious: and where there is true faith, it will have this effect upon men—to make them religious. Therefore I shall distinctly speak to these two things:

First, That without faith there can be no religion.

Secondly, That where there is a true faith, it will have this influence upon men, to make them religious.

First, That without faith there can be no religion. And this will appear by inquiring into the nature of

all human actions, whether civil or religious: and this is common to both of them, that they suppose some kind of faith or persuasion. All human actions have an order and reference to some end, and consequently suppose some knowledge of the end, and of the means whereby it may be attained. So that unless a man do believe and be persuaded that such a thing is some way or other good for him, and consequently desirable and fit to be propounded as an end, and that this end is attainable, and the means which he useth are probable and likely for the attaining of this end, he will sit still and do nothing at all about it. So that, without faith, it is impossible to do any thing: he that believes nothing will do nothing.

To instance first in civil actions, in the common affairs and concernments of life; all these are done by virtue of some faith or persuasion concerning them. For example, husbandry, or merchandize; no man will apply himself to these, but upon some belief or persuasion of the possibility and necessity, or, at least, usefulness and convenience, of these to the ends of life. No man would plough or sow if he did not believe that there were such a thing as the growing of corn, and that it is necessary for the support of our lives, and if he were not persuaded of the probability of reaping some fruit and benefit of his pains and industry. No man would traffic to Turkey or the Indies, if he did not believe there were such places, and that they afforded such commodities, and that he might have them upon such terms as might recompense the adventure of his charge and pains. And so in all other actions of life.

So it is in Divine and religious things; nothing

is done without faith. No man will worship God, unless he believe there is a God; unless he be persuaded there is such a being, which, by reason of his excellency and perfection, may challenge our veneration; and unless he believe the goodness of this God, that "he will reward those that diligently serve him." For all acts of religion being reasonable, they suppose at least an object and an end; that there is a God to be worshipped, and that it is not in vain to serve him. This faith is necessary to natural religion. And in case God do discover and reveal his will to men, no man can obey the will of God, unless he be persuaded that God hath some way or other made known his will; and be persuaded likewise as to the particular instance wherein his obedience is required, that this is God's will. For instance, no man will obey the precepts of the Bible as Divine laws and commands, unless he be persuaded that the doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures is a Divine revelation. So likewise no man can entertain Christ as the Messias and Saviour of the world, and yield obedience to his laws, unless he believes that he was sent of God, and ordained by him to be a Prince and a Saviour. So that you see the necessity of faith to religion.

Secondly, I shall shew the influence that a Divine faith hath upon men to make them religious. A true Divine faith supposeth a man satisfied and persuaded of the reasonableness and necessity of being religious; that it is reasonable for every man to be so, and that it is necessary to his interest. Now there needs no more to be done to put a man upon any thing, but to satisfy him of these two things—that the action you persuade him to is reasonable; that is, possible and fit to be done; and that it is

highly his interest to do it: that is, if he do it, it will be eminently for his advantage; if he do not do it, it will be eminently to his prejudice, and he is a lost and undone man. If you can once possess a man, that is in any degree sober and considerate, with these persuasions, you may make him do any thing of which he is thus persuaded. Now a true Divine faith supposeth a man satisfied and persuaded of all this.

1. Of the reasonableness of religion. He that verily believes there is a God, believes there is a being that hath all excellency and perfection, that is infinitely good, and wise, and just, and powerful, that made and preserves all things. Now he that believes such a being as this, cannot but think it reasonable that he should be esteemed, and honoured, and adored by all those creatures that are sensible and apprehensive of these excellences; that, seeing he is infinitely good, and the fountain of all being, and all the blessings we enjoy, we should love so great a benefactor, and thankfully acknowledge his goodness to us; not only by constant praise of him, but by an universal obedience to his will, and a cheerful submission to his pleasure. For what more reasonable than gratitude? that, seeing he is infinitely wise and powerful, as well as good, we should trust in him, and depend upon him in all conditions, and seek to him for what we want? For what more reasonable than to place our confidence in him, who is able and willing to do us good; and to sue to him who knows our wants, and is ready to supply them? And seeing he is truth itself, and hath been pleased to reveal his will to us; what can be more reasonable than to believe all those discoveries and revelations which "God, who cannot lie," hath made to

us, and to comply with the intention of them? And seeing he is the original pattern of all excellency and perfection; what can be more reasonable than to imitate the perfections of the Divine nature, and to endeavour to be as like God as we can? And these are the sum of all religion. So that whoever firmly believes a God, and that he hath revealed and made known his will to the world, cannot but be fully satisfied and persuaded of the reasonableness and equity of religion, and all those duties which religion requires of us; and consequently, of the possibility of performing all those duties which religion requires of us, by the assistance of the grace and strength which God is ready to afford us, if we beg it of him. For no man that believes the goodness of God (which every man does, that believes a God), can think that he will make it our duty to do any thing which he hath left us in an utter impossibility of doing.

2. A true Divine faith supposeth a man satisfied and persuaded of the necessity of religion; that is, that it is necessary to every man's interest to be religious; that it will be highly for our advantage to be so, and eminently to our prejudice to be otherwise; that if we be so we shall be happy, if we be not we shall be miserable and undone for ever. And every man that believes a God, and the revelations which he hath made, cannot but be fully satisfied of this.

And this will appear upon these two accounts.

1. From the nature and reason of the thing. And,

2. From the promises and threatenings of God's word.

1. From the nature and reason of the thing. Every man that believes a God, must believe him to be the supreme good; and the greatest happiness to

consist in the enjoyment of him; and a separation from him to be the greatest misery. Now God is not to be enjoyed, but in a way of religion. Holiness makes us like to God, and likeness will make us love him; and love will make us happy in the enjoyment of him; and without this it is impossible to be happy. There can be no happiness without pleasure and delight; and we cannot take pleasure in any thing we do not love; and there can be no love, without a likeness and suitableness of disposition. So long as God is good, and we evil; so long as he is pure, and we unholy; so long as he hates sin, and we love it; there can be no happy intercourse, no agreeable communion, and delightful society, between God and us. So that if we be holy, happiness will result from this temper: and if we be wicked, we are necessarily and unavoidably miserable. Sin separates between God and us, and hinders our happiness; and it is impossible that a wicked man should be near God, or enjoy him. God and a sinner are two such unequal matches, that it is impossible to bring them together; "for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? or what communion hath light with darkness?"

2. Every man who believes the revelations which God hath made, cannot but be satisfied, how much religion is his interest from the promises and threatenings of God's word. God in his word hath, in plain and express terms, promised everlasting glory and happiness to them that obey him; and hath threatened wicked men with dreadful and eternal punishments; "to them that, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality," he hath promised "eternal life: but to them that obey not the truth, but obey un-

righteousness," he hath threatened "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish." Now if we believe the gospel, which assures us of another life after this, and a future judgment, which will determine all men to a state of everlasting happiness or misery, we cannot but know it to be our interest, by all possible means, to endeavour to attain the happiness which God hath promised, and to avoid the misery which he hath threatened. All men naturally desire happiness, and dread misery and destruction; and these desires and fears are intimate to our natures, and can never be separated from them; because they flow immediately from those principles of self-love, and self-preservation, which are deeply rooted in every man's heart, and are woven into the very make and frame of his nature, and will last as long as our beings. And so long as these principles remain in us, there is no man that is firmly persuaded of the promises and threatenings of the gospel, but must believe it to be his highest interest to be religious. Fear and hope are the two passions which govern us; hope is as it were the spur that quickens us to our duty, and fear is the curb that restrains us from sin; and the greater the good hoped for, or the evil that is feared, the greater power and influence these passions have upon us. Now there cannot be a greater good, than complete and everlasting happiness; nor a greater evil, than extreme and eternal misery. So that whoever believes the promises and threatenings of the gospel, hath his hope raised to the expectation of the greatest good and happiness, in case of obedience; and his fears extended to the expectation of the greatest evil and misery, in case of final impenitence and disobedience. And a true Divine faith doth contain in

it both this hope and fear: for a faith in the promises of the gospel is nothing else, but the hopes of eternal life; and a belief of the threatenings of the gospel is nothing else, but the fear of hell and eternal misery. So that a firm belief of the promises and threatenings of the gospel, must needs have as great influence upon men to make them religious, as the highest hopes and greatest fears can have; and those men that are not moved by the hopes of the greatest good, nor by the fears of the greatest danger, are not to be wrought upon in human ways, nothing will prevail with them.

Thus I have shewn you what influence a Divine faith hath upon religion; forasmuch as whoever believes there is a God, and that the Scriptures are the word of God, is fully satisfied and convinced how reasonable it is, and how much it is his interest to be religious. I come in the last place to the application of this discourse.

First, This shews why there is so little of true religion in the world; it is for want of faith, without which it is impossible for men to be religious. Men are not firmly persuaded that there is a God; that there is a Being above them that is omniscient, and knows every thing that they do, and takes notice of every word, and thought, and action; that is so good and so powerful, as to make those happy that love and obey him; and so just and powerful, as to make those miserable who hate him and rebel against him. Men are not persuaded that their souls are immortal; and that there is another life after this, in which men shall be happy or miserable to all eternity, according as they demean themselves in this world. Men are not firmly persuaded that the Scriptures are the word of God, and that

the precepts and prohibitions of the Bible are the laws of a great King, who will amply reward the observance of his laws, and severely vindicate the breach and violation of them. Men do not believe that the promises and threatenings of God's word are true, and that every jot and tittle of them shall be accomplished. For did men believe these things, they would be religious; they would not dare to live in any known sin or impiety of life: unless we can presume that a man can be seriously unwilling to be happy, and have a longing desire to be miserable, and undone for ever. For whoever believes the principles of religion, and the precepts, and promises, and threatenings that are contained in this holy book, and yet after all this can continue in sin, he must not only put off the principles of a reasonable creature, but must quit the very inclinations of his nature; that is, he must knowingly refuse that which he naturally desires, which is happiness; and must embrace that, which of all things that can be imagined he most abhors, and that is misery.

So that if men were verily persuaded, that the great, and holy, and just God, looks continually upon them, and that it is impossible to hide from him any thing that we do, they would not dare to commit any sin in his sight, and under the eye of him who is their Father and Master, their Sovereign and their Judge, their Friend and Benefactor; who is invested with all these titles, and stands to us in all these relations, which may challenge reverence and respect. Did men believe the holiness and justice of God, that he hates sin, and will not let it go unpunished, would they venture to make him a witness of their wickedness, who they believe will be

the avenger of it? Did men believe that they shall live for ever, and that after this short life is ended, they must enter upon eternity; that when they leave the world, there are but two ways which all men must go, either into life everlasting, or into eternal and intolerable torments; did men believe this, would they not with all possible care and diligence endeavour to attain the one, and avoid the other? Were men possessed with a belief of eternity, how would they despise temporal and transitory things! How would they neglect the concernments of this life, and overlook the little impertinences of time, and refer all their thoughts and cares and endeavours to eternity! This great and important interest would so fill their minds, and take up their thoughts, and employ their utmost cares, and endeavours, and diligence, that they would scarce regard, or speak, or think of any thing else; they would be restless and impatient, until they had secured this grand affair and concernment; they would subordinate all the interests of this world to that of the other, and make all the concernments of time to stoop to the grand concernment of eternity. Thus men would do, were they but firmly persuaded that there is another life after this, to which this bears no proportion.

Did men believe the Scripture to be the word of God, and to contain matters of the highest importance to our everlasting happiness; would they neglect it and lay it aside, and study it no more than a man would do an almanack out of date, or than a man, who believes the attaining a philosopher's stone to be impossible, would study those books that treat of it? If men did believe that it contains plain and easy directions for the attaining of eternal hap-

piness, and escaping eternal misery; they would converse much with it, make it their companion and their counsellor, "meditate in it day and night," read it with all diligence, and put in practice the directions of it.

So that, whatever men pretend, it is plain, that those who neglect God and religion, and contradict the precepts of his word by their lives, they do not firmly believe there is a God, nor that this book is the word of God. If this faith and persuasion were firmly rooted in men, they could not live wickedly. For a man that desires happiness, can no more neglect those means which he is convinced are necessary for the obtaining of it, than a man that desires life can neglect the means which he knows to be necessary for the preservation of it.

Secondly, If faith have so great an influence upon religion, then the next use shall be to persuade men to believe. No man can be religious that doth not believe these two things:

First, The principles of natural religion—that there is a God; that his soul is immortal; and that there are future rewards.

Secondly, That the Scriptures are the word of God; or, which comes all to one, that the doctrine contained in them is a Divine revelation. Therefore whoever would persuade men to be religious, he must begin here; and whoever would improve men in religion and holiness, he must labour to strengthen this principle of faith. Faith is the root of all other graces: and they will flourish or decay, according to the degrees of our faith. Now he that would persuade a man or prevail with him to do any thing, must do it one of these three ways; either by entreaty, or authority, or argument; either he must

entreat him as a friend, or command him as subject to him and under his power, or convince him as a man. Now he that should go about to entreat men to believe any thing, or to charge them so to do, before he hath convinced them, by sufficient arguments, that it is reasonable to do so, would, in my opinion, take a preposterous course. He that entreats or chargeth a man to do any thing, supposeth that he can do the thing if he will: but a man cannot believe what he will; the nature of a human understanding is such, that it cannot assent without evidence, nor believe any thing to be true, unless it see reason so to do, any more than a man can see a thing without light. So that if the dearest friend that I have in the world should beg of me with the greatest importunity; or any man that hath the greatest authority over me, should lay his severest commands upon me to believe a thing, for which I see no reason, I could not do it; because nothing can command assent, but evidence. So that he that would persuade men to believe either the principles of natural religion, or any Divine revelation, must convince them of the truth of them; for it is unreasonable to desire a man to believe any thing, unless I give him good reason why he should.

And this being the proper course which is to be taken, there are two sorts of persons to whom I shall apply myself in this exhortation: those who do not believe these things, and those who are persuaded of them: to the former, in order to the begetting of faith in them; to the latter, in order to the strengthening and confirming of their faith.

Those who do not believe, are of two sorts; either such as do positively disbelieve these things, and make it their business to arm themselves against

them with all the arguments they can; who are so far from believing a God, or any Divine revelation, that they endeavour to persuade themselves of the contrary, that there is no such thing; or else they are such as are indifferent about these matters. They have received the principles of religion by their education, and they have nothing to say against them, nor for them; they never considered them, nor the proper consequences of them; they neither believe nor disbelieve them upon any reasonable account.

Now these are to be dealt withal in the same way: for whatever will convince the disbeliever, will much more persuade the indifferent, and confirm the weak. For faith is to be strengthened by the same arguments by which it is wrought. Therefore I shall apply myself to convince unbelievers; and every one may apply those arguments which I use to this purpose, for the strengthening of their own faith.

But before I come to those arguments I intend to offer for the conviction of those that do not believe, I think it convenient to endeavour, if possible, to remove a violent, and I think unreasonable prejudice which men have received against all those who endeavour to make religion reasonable. As if Bellarmine had been in the right when he said, "That faith was rather to be defined by ignorance than by knowledge." The plain English of which is, that it is for want of understanding that men believe the gospel; and if the world were but a little more knowing and wise, nobody would be a Christian. I know not how it comes to pass, whether through the artifice of the popish party, who "hate the light, lest it should reprove them, and make

them manifest;" or through the ignorance of too many well-meaning protestants; I say, I know not how it comes to pass, but so it is, that every one that offers to give a reasonable account of his faith, and to establish religion upon rational principles, is presently branded for a Socinian; of which we have a sad instance in that incomparable person Mr. Chillingworth, the glory of this age and nation, who, for no other cause that I know of, but his worthy and successful attempts to make the Christian religion reasonable, and to discover those firm and solid foundations upon which our faith is built, hath been requited with this black and odious character. But if this be Socinianism, for a man to inquire into the grounds and reasons of the Christian religion, and to endeavour to give a satisfactory account why he believes it, I know no way but that all considerate inquisitive men, that are above fancy and enthusiasm, must be either Socinians or atheists.

I cannot imagine how men can do greater disservice to religion, than by taking it off from the rational and solid basis upon which it stands, and bearing the world in hand, that men ought to believe without reason; for this is to turn faith into credulity, and to level Christian religion with the vilest and most groundless enthusiasms that ever were in the world. Indeed if we had only to deal with Henry Nicholas and Jacob Behmen, who fight against us in the dark, not with reasons and arguments, but with insignificant words, and obscure phrases; we might make a shift to bear up against them with this principle, and we might charge them to believe us, as they do us to believe them, without giving them any reason for it: but if we were to deal with Celsus, or Julian, or Porphyry, or some

of our modern atheists, we should soon find how vain it would be to go about to cajole them with phrases, and to gain them over to Christianity, by telling them that they must deny their reason, and lay aside their understandings, and believe they know not why. If the great pillars of Christianity, the ancient fathers, had taken this course in their apologies for Christian religion, it had never triumphed over Judaism and paganism as it did; and whoever hath read over those defences and vindications of the Christian religion against Jews and heathens, which were written in the first ages of the church, especially the books of Origen against Celsus, and Eusebius's book *De Demonst.* and *Præparat. Evangel.* shall find that they did very solicitously endeavour to satisfy the world by all rational ways both of the truth and reasonableness of Christian religion. And if that was a good way then, it is so now; and never more necessary than in this age, which I fear hath as many atheists and infidels, that go under the name of Christians, as ever were in any age since Christian religion was first planted in the world.

But my design at present is not to persuade men particularly to the belief of Christianity (that I intend hereafter, by God's assistance to speak to), but to persuade men to the belief of religion in general. So that all that I shall do at present shall be, as briefly as I can, to offer some arguments and considerations to persuade men to the belief of the principles of natural religion, and of the revelation which God hath made of his mind and will in the Holy Scriptures.

I. To persuade men to believe the principles of natural religion, such as the being of a God; the

immortality of the soul; and future rewards after this life; I shall offer these two considerations:

First, That it is most reasonable so to do.

Secondly, That it is infinitely most prudent.

First, As to the being of God. Do but consider these two things, which are undeniable—that there is a world, however it came; and that mankind do generally consent in a confident persuasion that there is a God, whatever be the cause of it. Now these two things being certain, and not liable to any question, let us inquire whether a reasonable account can be given of these without a God.

1. Supposing there be no God, how came this vast and orderly frame of the world? There are but two ways that can be imagined. Either it was from eternity always of itself; or it began sometime to be. That it should be always of itself, though it may be imagined of the heavens, and the earth, which as to the main are permanent, and continue the same: yet in things that succeed one after another, it is altogether unimaginable. As in the generation of men, there can be no doubt, whether every one of them was from another, or some of themselves. Some of them must be of themselves: for whatever number of causes be imagined in orderly succession, some of them must have no cause, but be of themselves. Now that which is of itself, and the cause of all others, is the first. So that there must be a first man; and the age of man being finite, this first man must have a beginning. So, that an infinite succession of men should have been, is impossible; and consequently, that men were always. But I need not insist much upon this, because few or none of our modern atheists pitch upon this way. Besides that Aristotle, who is reputed the greatest assertor

of the eternity of the world, doth acknowledge an infinite progress and succession of causes to be one of the greatest absurdities.

Suppose then the world began sometime to be; it must either be made by counsel and design; that is, produced by some being that knew what it did, that did contrive and frame it as it is; which, it is easy to conceive, a being that is infinitely good, and wise, and powerful, might do: but this is to own a God: or else the matter of it being supposed to have been always, and in continual motion and tumult, it at last happened to fall into this order, and the parts of matter, after various agitations, were at length entangled and knit together in this order, in which we see the world to be. But can any man think this reasonable to imagine, that in the infinite variety which is in the world, all things should happen by chance, as well and as orderly as the greatest wisdom could have contrived them? Whoever can believe this, must do it with his will, and not with his understanding.

But seeing it must be granted that something is of itself; how easy is it to grant such a Being to be of itself, as hath other perfections proportionable to necessary existence; that is infinitely good, and wise, and powerful? And there will be no difficulty in conceiving how such a Being as this should make the world.

2. This likewise is undeniable—that mankind do generally consent in a confident persuasion that there is a God, whatever be the cause of this. Now the reason of so universal a consent in all places and ages of the world, must be one and constant: but no one and constant reason of this can be given, unless it be from the frame and nature of

man's mind and understanding, which hath the notion of a Deity stamped upon it, or, which is all one, hath such an understanding, as will in its own free use and exercise find out a God. And what more reasonable than to think, that if we be God's workmanship, he should set this mark of himself upon us, that we might know to whom we belong? And I dare say, that this account must needs be much more reasonable and satisfactory to any indifferent man, than to resolve this universal consent into tradition, or state policy, both which are liable to inexplicable difficulties, as * I have elsewhere shewn at large.

II. As to the immortality of the soul. Supposing a God, who is an infinite spirit, it is easy to imagine the possibility of a finite spirit: and supposing the goodness of God, no man can doubt, but that when he made all things, he would make some best; and the same goodness which moved him to make things, would be a reason to continue those things for the longest duration they are capable of.

III. As to future rewards. Supposing the holiness and justice of God, that "he loves righteousness, and hates iniquity;" and that he is the magistrate and governor of the world, and concerned to countenance goodness, and discourage sin; and considering the promiscuous dispensation of his providence in this world, and how "all things happen alike to all;" it is most reasonable to conclude, that after this life men shall be punished and rewarded.

Secondly, It is infinitely most prudent. In matters of great concernment a prudent man will incline to the safest side of the question. We have consi-

* See Sermon I. vol. i. p. 317. where the arguments here briefly named are handled at large.

dered which side of these questions is most reasonable: let us now think which is safest. For it is certainly most prudent to incline to the safest side of the question. Supposing the reasons for and against the principles of religion were equal, yet the danger and hazard is so unequal, as would sway a prudent man to the affirmative. Suppose a man believe there is no God, nor life after this; and suppose he be in the right, but not certain that he is, (for that I am sure in this case is impossible;) all the advantage he hath by this opinion, relates only to this world and this present time: for he cannot be the better for it when he is not. Now what advantage will it be to him in this life? He shall have the more liberty to do what he pleaseth; that is, it furnishes him with a stronger temptation to be intemperate, and lustful, and unjust; that is, to do those things which prejudice his body and his health, which cloud his reason, and darken his understanding; which will make him enemies in the world, and will bring him into danger. So that it is no advantage to any man to be vicious: and yet this is the greatest use that is made of atheistical principles; to comfort men in their vicious courses. But if thou hast a mind to be virtuous, and temperate, and just, the belief of the principles of religion will be no obstacle, but a furtherance to thee in this course. All the advantage a man can hope for by disbelieving the principles of religion, is to escape trouble and persecution in this world, which may happen to him upon account of religion. But supposing there be a God, and a life after this; then what a vast difference is there of the consequences of these opinions! as much as between finite and infinite, time and eternity!

Secondly, To persuade men to believe the Scriptures, I only offer this to men's consideration. If there be a God whose providence governs the world, and all the creatures in it, is it not reasonable to think that he hath a particular care of men, the noblest part of this visible world? and seeing he hath made them capable of eternal duration; that he hath provided for their eternal happiness, and sufficiently revealed to them the way to it, and the terms and conditions of it: now let any man produce any book in the world, that pretends to be from God, and to do this; that, for the matter of it, is so worthy of God, the doctrines whereof are so useful, and the precepts so reasonable, and the arguments so powerful, the truth of all which was confirmed by so many great and unquestionable miracles, the relation of which hath been transmitted to posterity, in public and authentic records, written by those who were eye and ear-witnesses of what they wrote, and free from suspicion of any worldly interest and design; let any produce a book like this, in all these respects; and which, over and besides, hath, by the power and reasonableness of the doctrines contained in it, prevailed so miraculously in the world, by weak and inconsiderable means, in opposition to all the wit and power of the world, and under such discouragements, as no other religion was ever assaulted with; let any man bring forth such a book, and he hath my leave to believe it as soon as the Bible. But if there be none such, as I am well assured there is not, then every one that thinks God hath revealed himself to men, ought to embrace and entertain the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, as revealed by God.

And now, having presented men with such arguments and considerations as are proper, and I think

sufficient to induce belief, I think it not unreasonable to entreat and urge men diligently and impartially to consider these matters; and if there be weight in these considerations to sway reasonable men, that they would not suffer themselves to be biassed by prejudice, or passion, or interest, to a contrary persuasion. Thus much I may with reason desire of men: for though men cannot believe what they will, yet men may, if they will, consider things seriously and impartially, and yield or withhold their assent, as they shall see cause, after a thorough search and examination.

If any man will offer a serious argument against any of the principles of religion, and will debate the matter soberly, as one that considers the infinite consequences of things one way or other, and would gladly be satisfied, he deserves to be heard what he can say: but if a man will turn religion into raillery, and confute it by two or three bold jests; he doth not make religion, but himself ridiculous, in the opinion of all considerate men; because he sports with his life.

So that it concerns every man that would not trifle away his soul, and fool himself into irrecoverable misery, with the greatest seriousness to inquire into these things, whether they be so or not, and patiently to consider the arguments that are brought for them.

And when you are examining these matters, do not take into consideration any sensual or worldly interest: but deal fairly and impartially with yourselves. Think with yourselves that you have not the making of things true or false; that the principles of religion are either true or false, before you think of them. The truth of things is already fixed; either there is a God, or no God; either your souls

are immortal, or they are not; either the Scriptures are a Divine revelation, or an imposture; one of these is certain and necessary, and they are not now to be altered. Things will not comply with your conceits, and bend themselves to your interests. Therefore, do not think what you would have to be: but consider impartially what is.*

And if, upon inquiry, you be convinced that it is the greatest reason and prudence to believe that there is a God, and a future state, and that the Scriptures are the word of God, then meditate much of these things; attend to the proper consequences of such a persuasion; and resolve to live as becomes those who believe there is a God, and another life after this, and that it is best for you to obey the precepts of his word, being persuaded that whatever is there promised in case of obedience, or threatened in case of disobedience, will certainly be accomplished.

And labour to strengthen yourselves in this belief; because faith is the spring of all rational actions, and the root of all other graces; and according to the strength and weakness of faith, your holiness, and obedience, and graces, will flourish and decay.

And because the matters of faith do not fall under our senses, and the things of another world are invisible, and at distance, and consequently not so apt to affect us, as present and sensible things, we should take the more pains with ourselves, that by revolving frequently in our minds the thoughts of God, and representing to ourselves the happiness and misery of another world, they may have as great an effect upon us, as if they were present to us, and we saw them with our bodily eyes.

* Of this see more in the Sermon before-mentioned, p. 275.

SERMON CCXXIV.

OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, THE MEANS OF ITS CONVEYANCE, AND OUR OBLIGATION TO RECEIVE IT.

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.—JOHN XX. 31.

I HAVE largely discoursed concerning the general nature of faith, and more particularly concerning the faith which is truly Divine and religious: in the latitude of which is contained a persuasion concerning the principles of natural religion, the being of God, the immortality of the soul, and a future state; and a persuasion of the Divine revelation of the Scriptures, and the matters contained in them. Now among matters of Divine revelation, the doctrine of the gospel is a principal part; which is the last and most perfect revelation, which God hath made to the world, by his Son Jesus Christ; and a firm belief and persuasion of this, is that which is called Christian faith, or the faith of the gospel; and which, by way of eminency, is usually called faith in the New Testament.

Now Christian faith is not opposed to a Divine faith, but is comprehended under it; as being a principal and eminent part of Divine faith, but not all that which may be called Divine faith; Christian faith supposeth a belief of the principles of natural religion; and a belief of those revelations which

God formerly made under the Old Testament: but it doth only formally contain in it a belief of the gospel, viz. that revelation which God hath in these last days made to the world by his Son Jesus Christ. The heathens, who were destitute of Divine revelation, did only believe the principles of natural religion; and the generality of them did not believe those but in a very imperfect manner. The Jews, "to whom were committed the oracles of God," did superadd to the belief of the principles of natural religion, the belief of such revelations as God was pleased to make to them under that dispensation. Christian faith superadds to both the former, a belief of the revelation of the gospel.

I shall now, therefore, by God's assistance, endeavour to open to you the nature of Christian faith from these words; in which you have these three things considerable:

First, The end of committing the gospel to writing, which was, to persuade men to believe in Christ, to propagate and continue Christian faith in the world; "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God:" and by faith to bring men to a participation of those benefits, and the salvation which Christ was the author of: "And that believing ye might have life through his name." "These were written;" ταῦτα, "these," which may either refer to σημεῖα, "these signs or miracles," referring to the former verse, "and many other signs," &c. but these signs or miracles are written to confirm Jesus to be the person he pretended to be, the Messias, the Son of God, and consequently to confirm the truth of the doctrine which he delivered; that, by this confirmation, men might be induced to believe him to be the

true Messias, and to give entertainment to his doctrine.

Or else (which is very probable) the word ταῦτα may refer to the whole history of the gospel, in which you have an account of the life of Christ, and the doctrine which he taught, and the miracles which were wrought for the confirmation of it. And so we may look upon these two verses as a conclusion of the whole history of the gospel written by the four evangelists. For as for the chapter following, it seems not to be written by St. John himself, but by the church, probably, as Grotius conjectures, by the church of Ephesus, where he had resided, and whom he had acquainted with the particulars which are there set down; the principal of which is, the prediction of our Saviour concerning his long life, for the sake of which the rest of the story seems to be brought in; which particular was not fit to be recorded till after his death; I say, it seems probable that St. John ended his gospel here, and that the last chapter was added by others, as the last chapter of the Pentateuch was added by some other after the death of Moses; and the last chapter of Joshua after his death. And this seems very evident from the 24th verse of the chapter; where, after a relation of our Saviour's prediction, concerning "the disciple whom Jesus loved," it is added, "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things (that is, the foregoing history of the gospel), and we know that his testimony is true;" which seems plainly to be spoken by some other persons: for it were improper for him to say this of himself, "We know that his testimony is true."

So that here seems to be an end of the history of

Christ which St. John wrote; and these two verses seem to be the conclusion of the whole gospel written by the four evangelists; and then the sense of them will be this; "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book;" that is, the disciples were witnesses of many other miracles which Christ wrought, which they did not think necessary to set down in this book, that is, in this history of Christ written by the four evangelists: "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name;" that is, These things which are recorded in this history, this account which is here given of the life, and actions, and doctrine, and miracles of Christ, is sufficient to bring men to the faith of the gospel, to satisfy men that Christ was the Messias, the Son of God, and consequently that his doctrine is true.

And that this conclusion doth refer to the whole history of the gospel written by the four evangelists, I am induced to believe upon these two accounts:

1. Because St. John's gospel doth not seem to be intended for a history of the life and actions of Christ: but an appendix to the history which had been written before by the other evangelists, and to supply only what they had omitted. Therefore you find that he gives no account of the genealogy or birth of our Saviour, nor of his sermon upon the mount, which did contain the sum of his doctrine, nor of any of his miracles, or his other discourses, which are related by the other evangelists; nor doth he relate any more of the history of his life, than was just necessary to bring in and connect those things which he thought fit to superadd to the

former history. So that, considering how defective this gospel, taken by itself, is, in the most essential parts of the history of the life, and doctrine, and actions, of Christ; no man can think that St. John did intend this for a full and sufficient account of the life, and doctrine, and miracles of Christ; or that, upon this imperfect relation, in which he had knowingly omitted many of the most material and considerable things belonging to the history of Christ, he could expect that men should receive full satisfaction concerning him. Therefore I think it is highly reasonable, and almost necessary to conclude, that when he says, "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God;" he does not solely refer to the gospel which was written by himself; but to the whole history of the gospel, which was put together into one book or volume, which was completed by this appendix.

2. Another reason I have for this, which doth much strengthen this conjecture, is what I find in Eusebius, in the 18th chapter of the third book of his history, where he tells us to this purpose, "That St. John, who lived the last of the apostles, did revise what they had written of the history of Christ, and added his Gospel as an appendix to the rest."

I have insisted the longer upon this, that no man might think, when St. John says, "These things are written that ye might believe," that his gospel taken alone and by itself is a sufficient account of Christ, and contains all that was requisite to bring men to believe on him. This is the first thing in the words, the end of committing the gospel to writing.

Secondly, You have here the nature of Christian

faith described; it is a believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; that is, that he is the true Messias prophesied of in the Old Testament, and promised as the Saviour of the world; and that he is the Son of God, who came from the Father into the world; and took our nature upon him, that he might teach us and go before us in the way to eternal happiness.

Thirdly, The blessed effect of this faith, or the benefit that redounds to us upon believing: "that believing, ye might have life through his name;" that is, that upon these terms and conditions you might be made partakers of all those blessings and benefits which Christ, the Saviour of the world, hath purchased for us, which are here set forth to us in the name of "life;" it being usual in the phrase of Scripture, to express to us those things which are most excellent and desirable by "life." Now the principal benefits which Christ hath purchased, and which in Scripture we are said to be made partakers of by believing, are regeneration, justification or pardon of sin, and eternal life and salvation; and the two first of these, as well as the last, are called life in Scripture. Regeneration, (in which I include the continuance and progress of this work, which is sanctification) that is, a new life, (Rom. vi. 4.) it is called "newness of life." And we are said to have this life by faith; (Gal. ii. 20.) "And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." And, (Col. ii. 12.) "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him;" that is, regenerated and born to a new life. How? "By the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead;" that is, by believing the power of God, who raised up Christ from the dead, for

the confirmation of the truth of the gospel; (1 John v. 1.) "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." So likewise justification is called life. While we are under sentence of condemnation, we are dead in law; but being justified and pardoned, we are restored to life. So the apostle expresseth it, (Rom. v. 18.) "So by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." And that we are justified by faith, the Scripture tells us so frequently, that I shall not cite any texts for it.

And then eternal life and salvation; and this is the consummation of all, and I doubt not but is here principally intended in the text by the word life. So that the meaning of this expression, "that believing ye might have life through his name," is, that by faith of the gospel ye might be renewed, and pardoned, and saved; though I think that the last, viz. eternal life and salvation, is principally, though not solely intended, as will appear by comparing this place with these parallel texts: (John iii. 15.) "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life:" and, (ver. 36.) "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." (John v. 24.) "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life." (1 Pet. i. 9.) "The end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

Thus I have, as briefly as I well could, explained to you the meaning of the words, which I have done the more fully, that you may see how those observations which I shall raise from them are contained in them. The observations are these:

First, That writing is the way which the wisdom of God hath pitched upon, as the standing way to

convey the knowledge of the gospel to the world. "These things are written."

Secondly, That all things necessary to be believed in order to salvation, are contained in the gospel. "These things are written that ye might believe, and believing might have life:" but if any thing necessary to be believed by Christians, in order to eternal salvation, were omitted, then the gospel would be written to no purpose, and would fail in the end for which it was written.

Thirdly, That the miracles related in the gospel are a proper and sufficient means, or argument, to bring men to Christian faith. For this is the narrowest and most restrained sense in which we can take the words; "These things," that is, these miracles, "are written that ye might believe," &c. Now if St. John, by the Spirit of God, did record miracles to this end, we may conclude that they are proper and sufficient for this end.

Fourthly, That a credible history does give men sufficient assurance of matter of fact, and such as we may safely build a Divine faith upon. For, if these miracles were recorded for this end, that men might believe, then a credible history or relation that such miracles were done, is sufficient to assure us that such miracles were wrought; and upon this assurance we may build our faith; otherwise, it had been in vain to have recorded these miracles to this end.

Fifthly, That we are not now-a-days destitute of a sufficient ground of faith; because we have these writings credibly conveyed to us, which contain the doctrine of the gospel, and the relation of the miracles, written for the confirmation of it.

Sixthly, That men now-a-days, those to whom

the gospel comes, are under an obligation to believe; or, which is all one, that now-a-days men may be guilty of such a sin as unbelief: for now-a-days we may have sufficient grounds of faith.

Seventhly, That to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is truly and properly Christian faith. This is the description which is here given of it, that it is a believing, "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

Eighthly, That to believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, is truly and properly sanctifying, and justifying, and saving faith; by this faith we have life. "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

These observations are all virtually contained in these words. The greatest part of them I shall very lightly pass over, and speak but briefly to them, because I intend mainly to insist upon the two last; in the handling of which, I shall open to you the nature of Christian faith, and shew you, that the faith which is here described, is that which is truly and properly justifying and saving.

First, That writing is the way which the wisdom of God hath pitched upon, as the standing way of conveying the knowledge of the gospel to the world. This is matter of fact, and for the proof of it we have the evidence of the thing. The gospel *de facto* was written, and this writing is conveyed down to us, and is the instrument which God hath in all ages since the apostles' time, that is, since the eye and ear-witnesses of the miracles of Christ and his doctrine ceased, made use of to convey to the world the knowledge of the gospel. And here it were proper to shew what advantage this way of convey-

ance of the gospel hath above oral tradition: but that I have already done,* in some former discourses, where I shewed at large, that this way of conveyance is a more universal and diffusive, a more certain, and liable to less imposture and falsification, a more equal and uniform, and a more human way of conveyance, than oral tradition; so that I shall not insist longer upon this.

Secondly, That all things necessary to be believed by Christians, in order to salvation, are contained in the written gospel; or else, how could St. John, in reason, say, that "these things are written (to this end) that men might believe and be saved;" if these things be not sufficient to this end? which certainly they are not, if any thing necessary to be believed in order to salvation be left out. The papists being urged with this text, to prove the sufficiency of the written word, in opposition to those traditional doctrines which they pretend to be necessary over and besides the written word, tell us, that St. John doth not here speak of the doctrine of Christ, but only of his miracles; these are written to confirm our faith of the Messias; but the doctrine of Christ was not all written, but left to the apostles to be delivered by mouth to their successors, and so down to posterity. But I have shewn before, that the necessary doctrines of the gospel, as well as the miracles, are comprehended in these things, which, St. John says, were written. Besides that, it will be very hard for any man to devise a convenient reason, why miracles, as well as doctrines, might not have been left to the apostles, to have been traditionally delivered down to

* See the foregoing Sermons.

posterity without writing. For doctrines may as well be committed to writing, as relations of miracles; and miracles may be with as much ease, and certainty, and convenience in all respects, delivered down to posterity by an oral tradition, as doctrines may.

Thirdly, That the miracles related in the gospel, are a proper and sufficient means to bring men to Christian faith. That they are so, it is a good sign, that God did work them to this end, and afterwards commit them to writing for this very reason, that the knowledge of them might be conveyed to posterity, and there might still remain in the world a proper and sufficient argument to persuade men to believe; and we may well imagine, that God would not do any thing but what is very proper and sufficient for its end. Now that miracles were wrought by the Divine power purposely to this end, and that they are in reason a very sufficient attestation to a person, and confirmation of the doctrine which he brings, I have largely shewn elsewhere;* and that all along both in the Old and New Testament, God did empower Moses and the prophets, Christ and his apostles, to work miracles, to bring men to faith, and that this was the principal argument whereby those who did believe were wrought upon.

Fourthly, That credible history doth give men sufficient assurance of matter of fact; and such assurance, as we may safely build a Divine faith upon. We freely believe innumerable things, which are said to have been done many ages before we were born, and make not the least doubt of them,

* See the foregoing Sermons.

only upon the credit of history: so that if the relation of miracles be but granted to be a credible history, we may, upon the credit of the relation, safely believe that such miracles were wrought; and, if such miracles were wrought, we may safely believe the doctrine to be from God, for the confirmation of which they were wrought; and, consequently, a Divine faith may be safely built upon such an assurance of miracles, as we may have from a credible history and relation.

Fifthly, That we are not now-a-days destitute of a sufficient ground of faith; because the doctrine of the gospel hath still the same confirmation that it had, viz. miracles: only we who live at this distance from the time when, and the place where they were wrought, have the knowledge of them conveyed to us, and come to be assured of them, in another way. Those who lived in the age of Christ and his apostles, had assurance of miracles from their own senses: and we now are assured of them by credible history and relation. Now, though these ways be not equal, yet they are both sufficient to beget in us an undoubted assurance, and such as no prudent man hath any reason to doubt of. For a man may be as truly and undoubtedly certain, that is, as well satisfied that a thing was done, from the credit of history, as from his own senses. I make no more doubt whether there was such a person as Henry the Eighth, king of England, than I do whether I be in this place.

Sixthly, That now-a-days, those to whom the gospel comes, are under an obligation to believe; or that now-a-days there is such a sin as unbelief of the gospel. And I the rather note this, because there are some well-wishers to atheism, who, out of

prudence and regard to their own safety, choose rather secretly to undermine religion, than openly to deny it. I grant, indeed, that, in our Saviour's time, when such great miracles were wrought, those who saw those miracles (which they think nobody did) were under an obligation to believe, and guilty of a great sin in not believing the gospel; but now-a-days, when we see no such miracles wrought for the confirmation of the gospel, there lies no obligation upon any man to believe it; and that now there is no such sin as unbelief. Now, any man may, with half an eye, see the consequence of this assertion: for being once admitted, it doth as certainly destroy Christian religion, as if men should deny that there was any such person as Jesus Christ, or that he ever wrought any miracles: for if to disbelieve the gospel be no sin, and consequently brings a man into no danger; but on the other hand, dangers and persecutions do attend the belief and profession of it; it were the greatest folly in the world for any man to believe; unless this possibly may be greater, for a man who does believe it, not to obey and live according to it. And if this were true, it were the greatest imprudence that can be, for any man to be a Christian. And if that were once admitted, there is all the reason in the world that Christianity should be banished and extirpated; not only as useless and impertinent, but as a thing dangerous and pernicious to the welfare of mankind.

I shall therefore briefly prove to you, that it is now one of the greatest sins that men are capable of (except the sin against the Holy Ghost), for those who have the gospel sufficiently propounded to them, to disbelieve it; I say, except the sin against the Holy Ghost, which our Saviour tells

us, was " blaspheming the Spirit of God," whereby he wrought his miracles, and saying it was the spirit of the devil; and this sin, men in a lower degree and proportion may now-a-days be guilty of: for as the pharisees who saw the works that Christ did, and acknowledged them to be miracles, did commit the sin against the Holy Ghost, in ascribing those miracles, which were really wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost, to the power of the devil; so men now-a-days who own the history of Christ's miracles as true, may be guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost, in a lower proportion, by maliciously imputing those miracles to the power of the devil.

But excepting the sin against the Holy Ghost, the greatest sin that men are now capable of, is to disbelieve the gospel, when it is sufficiently propounded to them. Now the gospel is then sufficiently propounded, when there are sufficient grounds offered to persuade men to the belief of it; and I have already proved, that we now have sufficient ground to believe the gospel; and if so, then whosoever hath these grounds offered to him, is under an obligation to believe it: for every man is bound to believe that, for which he hath sufficient ground and reason; and every man sins who neglects his duty; that is, does not do that which he stands bound to do.

And not only whoever disbelieves the gospel, sins in so doing, but farther, he commits the greatest sin that now men are capable of. I say, now capable of: for I doubt not but that it was a sin of a higher degree, for those who saw Christ's miracles to disbelieve, than it is for us who have only the relation of them. For by the same reason, that

"he is more blessed that believes, and hath not seen;" a greater curse belongs to him, who hath seen, and yet doth not believe; and consequently such a person is guilty of a greater sin. But because we cannot now see the miracles of Christ, the greatest sin that men in this age are capable of, is to disbelieve the gospel confirmed by miracles, whereof we are assured by credible relation. For the sin of disbelieving now hath these two aggravations:

1. It is against sufficient light and evidence; and in this it is equal to the sins which are committed against natural light.

2. It is a sin against the greatest mercies and blessings that ever were offered to the world; and in this it exceeds the sins against natural light. Whoever disbelieves the gospel, he rejects the offer of eternal life and happiness. And these two aggravations the apostle puts together, (Heb. ii. 3.) "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him!" And if this be thus, it highly concerns us to inquire into the nature of this faith; and this brings me to the

Seventh observation; That to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is truly and properly Christian faith. But the consideration of this I shall leave to the next opportunity.

SERMON CCXXV.

OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, WHICH SANCTIFIES, JUSTIFIES, AND SAVES.

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.—JOHN XX. 31.

IN my former discourse upon these words, I proposed eight observations from them, six of which I have already dispatched, designing to discourse of the remaining two more at large. I proceed therefore to the

Seventh observation which I laid down, viz. That to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is truly and properly Christian faith. This is the description which is here given of Christian faith.

In prosecution of this, I shall do these two things:

First, Shew you what is included in "believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?"

Secondly, Prove that this is truly and properly Christian faith.

First, What is included in "believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?" It signifies a firm and effectual persuasion, that Jesus, that is, the person the history of whose life and death is related in the gospel, is the Christ; that is, the true Messias, promised and prophesied of in the Old Testament to be the Saviour of the world; and that he is "the Son of God, (that is,) the only-be-

gotten of the Father," who was sent by him into the world, and took our nature upon him, that he might purchase eternal happiness for us, and instruct us, and go before us in the way to it. So that faith is a firm and effectual persuasion of, or assent to, the whole gospel. Faith signifies Christian religion, which comprehends an assent to the doctrines of the gospel, and a suitable life and conversation.

I say, a firm persuasion of this; for in the phrase of the New Testament, none are accounted true believers, or said to have a true faith in Christ, who do not firmly continue in this persuasion; and the owning and profession of it, notwithstanding all the sufferings and persecutions it might expose them to. And an effectual persuasion; for none are said truly to believe in Christ, who do not shew forth the proper and genuine effects of this faith; who do not live as they believe, and conform their lives to that doctrine, to the truth whereof they profess an assent.

And hence it is that true Christians, that is, those who did fashion their lives according to the gospel, are called believers, and the sum of all Christianity is usually contained in this word believing, which is the great principle of a Christian life; as in the Old Testament, all religion is expressed by the "faith of God;" so in the New, by "faith in Christ."

Now whosoever doth firmly and effectually entertain this truth, that Jesus, whom the gospel declares to us is the true Messias, and Saviour of the world, and the very Son of God, sent by him into the world for this purpose, that he might by his doctrine instruct, and by the example of his life go

before us in the way to eternal happiness, and by the merit and satisfaction of his death and sufferings, appease and reconcile God to men, and purchase for them the pardon of their sins and eternal life, upon the conditions of faith and repentance, and sincere obedience; I say, whosoever doth firmly and effectually entertain these truths, will consequently endeavour to obey the precepts of his doctrine, and to imitate the example of his life, and will expect salvation, that is, the pardon of his sins, and eternal life, from no other: because he is verily persuaded he is a teacher, and a Saviour sent from God, that his doctrine is true, and his satisfaction available, and that the rewards which he hath promised to those who believe and obey him, and the punishments which he hath threatened to the unbelievers and disobedient, shall all certainly be fulfilled and accomplished. All this is included in "believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." So Christian faith, or the faith of the gospel, contains plainly in it these particulars:

1. An assent of the understanding to this truth, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was a person commissioned from heaven, and employed by God to bring men to eternal happiness. And this fundamental is necessary to all the subsequent acts of faith, and that upon which they depend.

2. An assent of the understanding to the truth of all those things which this person delivered to the world. So that if he tells us, that his death hath made expiation for the sins of men, upon the conditions of faith and repentance and obedience, and that God by him doth command the world to do such and such things, and in case of obedience will confer such and such rewards upon men, but in

case of disobedience will inflict such punishments upon them; we are to believe all this to be true; because the person who acquainted us with these things was sent by God, and employed from heaven upon this message.

3. And consequently, a relying and depending upon him, and no other, for the conferring of these benefits, and making good these promises to us.

4. Obedience to all his laws and commands; because believing them to be from God we cannot but assent to them as good, and as laying an obligation upon us to yield obedience to them: and if we do not obey them, we are presumed to disbelieve them; for if we did truly and heartily believe them to be the commands of God, we would obey them.

Now that obedience of heart and life to the precepts and commands of the gospel, as well as an assent of the understanding to the truth of the gospel-revelation, and a trusting and relying upon the merits of Christ, is included in the Scripture notion of faith, will evidently appear to any that will consider these texts. (Rom. i. 5.) "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name;" where the belief of the gospel is called "the obedience of faith." (Rom. x. 16.) "But they have not all obeyed the gospel: for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?" But if faith do not include obedience, how could he prove that there were some that did not obey the gospel, because Isaiah said, there were some that did not believe it? And so likewise by comparing 1 Tim. iv. 10. where he is said to be "the Saviour of them that believe," with Heb. v. 9. where he is said to be the "author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." As also by comparing Gal.

v. 6. where it is said, "For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love," with 1 Cor. vii. 19. "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing: but the keeping of the commandments of God." And so likewise by those texts, where unbelief and disobedience are equivalently used. I will but mention one, (Heb. iii. 12.) The apostle, from the example of the Israelites, cautions Christians against unbelief: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." And repeating the same caution in the next chapter, at the 11th verse, he varies the phrase a little, "Lest any man fall after the same example of disobedience;" the word is ἀπειθείας, which indeed our translators render *unbelief;* but that confirms that which I bring it for, that disobedience and unbelief are the same. And so likewise we find faith and disobedience opposed frequently in Scripture. (John iii. 36.) "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life." In the Greek it is, "He that obeyeth not the Son," as you will see in the margin of the Bible. (1 Pet. ii. 7.) "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner." And this doth likewise appear in all those texts, wherein repentance, and our forgiving of others, and several other acts of obedience, are made the conditions of our justification, or the omission of them, sins, as well as faith. So that we cannot be said to be "justified by faith alone," unless that faith include in it obedience. I have insisted the longer

upon this, because the right understanding the Scripture-notion of faith in Christ, doth very much depend upon this: and if this one thing, that the Scripture-notion of faith doth include in it obedience to the precepts of the gospel, were but well understood and considered, it would silence and put an end to those infinite controversies about faith and justification, which have so much troubled the Christian world, to the great prejudice of practical religion, and holiness of life.

Secondly, That this is truly and properly Christian faith. Which I shall prove by these two arguments.

1. Because it includes a belief of the whole gospel, or of all the revelation which God hath made to the world by Jesus Christ. And certainly, there cannot be a more proper notion of Christian faith, than to believe the revelation which God hath made by Jesus Christ: but to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, doth include this. For whosoever believes him to be the Messias, and the Son of God, believes him to have come from God, and to be authorized and commissioned by him to make known his mind to the world, and consequently will believe whatever he delivers. For whoever believes the goodness and veracity of God, as every man does that believes a God, cannot but assent to the truth of every thing which he is satisfied comes from God.

2. That to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," is truly and properly Christian faith, or the faith of the gospel, will appear, by considering how the Scriptures of the New Testament do constantly describe to us the faith of the gospel; and you shall find they do it, either by the very

phrase in the text, or other phrases or metaphors equivalent to it, or else by a belief of that which is the great argument and confirmation of Christ's being the Messias, the Son of God. Very often the faith of the gospel is described by the very phrase in the text, "believing that Jesus is the Christ," and that "he is the Son of God." (John iv. 41, 42.) "And many more believed, because of his own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." (John vi. 69.) "And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (John xi. 27.) Says Martha to Christ, "Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." (Acts viii. 37.) "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (1 John iii. 23.) "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment;" that is, that we should believe on him under this name and title of "Jesus Christ the Son of God." (1 John v. 1.) "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." And, (ver. 5.) "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?' And, (ver. 10.) "He that believeth on the Son of God;" that is, believeth Jesus to be the Son of God. And, (ver. 13.) "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

Sometimes the faith of the gospel is described to us by other phrases that are tantamount to these; such as signify that "he came from God," and was

sent by him into the world, and was the Messias whom they expected. (John iii. 2.) Nicodemus describes his faith in Christ thus; "I know that thou art a teacher come from God." (John vi. 29.) "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent;" that is, that ye believe me to be sent from God. (John viii. 24.) "For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins;" that is, if ye believe not that I am the Messias, whom you expect and look for. And so (John xiii. 19.) "That ye may believe that I am he." And, (John xi. 42.) "That they may believe that thou hast sent me." And, (John xvi. 30.) "By this we believe that thou camest forth from God." And, (John xvii. 8.) "They have believed that thou didst send me."

Sometimes the faith of the gospel is expressed by metaphors equivalent to these expressions, as by "coming to Christ," and "receiving him" as the true Messias, in several places, and sometimes by believing that which is the great argument and confirmation that Christ was the true Messias the Son of God, that is, believing his resurrection from the dead. (Rom. iv. 24.) "To whom it shall be imputed for righteousness, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." (Rom. x. 9.) "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Col. ii. 12.) "Through the faith of the operation of God, who raised him up from the dead." Where faith is described by a belief of the power whereby Christ was raised from the dead. And to mention no more, (1 Pet. i. 21.) "Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead." Now the reason why the faith of the gospel is described by the be-

lief of Christ's resurrection, is, because whoever believes that Christ was raised from the dead, cannot but be satisfied, that this great miracle was a sufficient attestation that he was no impostor, but that he was what he pretended to be, viz. the Son of God; and consequently that he ought to be believed and obeyed in all things. And thus much may suffice to have been spoken to this seventh observation.

Eighth observation; that to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," is truly and properly sanctifying, and justifying, and saving faith. So the text tells us, that this faith gives us life; "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name," that is, as I explained this phrase in the opening of the text, that upon these terms and conditions ye might be made partakers of all those blessings and benefits, which Christ the Saviour of the world hath purchased, which are here set forth under the name of life; it being usual in the phrase of Scripture to set forth to us those things which are most excellent and desirable, by life, which men value above all other things. Now the principal benefits which Christ hath purchased, and which we are said to be made partakers of by believing, are,

1. Regeneration; under which I include the continuance and progress of this work, which is sanctification.

2. Justification; by which I cannot find that the Scripture means any more than pardon or remission of sins.

3. Eternal life; and this I think is principally, though not solely intended here in the text, as I

have shewn, by comparing the text with other parallel texts in the same evangelist. (John iii. 15.) "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." And, (ver. 36.) "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." I say, I think eternal life is here principally intended, though this supposes the others, regeneration and justification, before we can attain it, which may also very well be included here in the term of life. My reasons are these:

1. Because I find in Scripture, that regeneration and justification are expressed by the name of life. Rom. vi. 4. our regeneration is called newness of life, because before we were "dead in sins and trespasses;" and (Rom. v. 18.) justification is called "justification of life," because, while our sins are unpardoned, and we are under the sentence of condemnation, we are dead in law; but being justified and pardoned, we are, as it were, restored to life again.

2. Because, in the phrase of Scripture, we are said to be regenerate, and sanctified, and justified by faith, as well as saved. (1 John v. 1.) "He that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." (Gal. ii. 20.) "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God;" speaking of the new life of sanctification. And (Col. ii.) we are said to be "risen with Christ," that is, born to a new life, "by the faith of the operation of God, that raised up Jesus from the dead;" and to "be justified by faith," in innumerable places. So that it is very probable upon these accounts that the evangelist here, when he says, "that believing, you might have life in his name," doth intend to take in regeneration and justification, as well as eternal life,

which is the consummation of all the blessings of the gospel. I come now to the observation, viz.

That this faith of the gospel, which I have described, is truly and properly a sanctifying, and justifying, and saving faith.

I. I shall shew that it is properly a sanctifying faith.

II. A justifying and saving faith.

I. It is truly sanctifying. I know that this term of a sanctifying faith, is not much in use among divines, and therefore it may seem a little more strange: but they might have used it if they had pleased, for it is every whit as proper to call faith sanctifying, as justifying, or saving. It is true, indeed, this express term of a sanctifying faith is no where in Scripture; no more are the very terms of justifying and saving faith: but we are said to be justified and saved by faith in Scripture, which is as much as if the terms had been used. And we are said also to be sanctified by faith, as well as justified and saved. (Acts xv. 9.) Our hearts are said to be purified by faith. And so likewise, our "victory over the world," that is, our conquering and subduing of our covetous and ambitious and sensual lusts and desires, is in a peculiar manner ascribed to this faith which I have described. (1 John v. 4, 5.) "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

II. That this faith is truly and properly justifying and saving faith. I put these, justification and sanctification, together, partly because they are of the same consideration as to the influence which faith hath upon them; and the latter follows upon the

former; for if we be justified by faith, that is, have our sins pardoned, by the same act of faith we are saved from hell, and consequently made capable of eternal life; I say, by the very same act of faith that we obtain the pardon of our sins, we are saved from hell, that is, the punishment due to sin; for pardon removes the guilt, and guilt is nothing else but an obligation to punishment: and partly, because I find the Scripture useth them promiscuously. When St. James disputes about justification by faith, he useth the term of being saved by faith; (James ii. 14.) "Can faith save him?" Sometimes of being justified, (ver. 24.) "So that a man is not justified by faith only."

In speaking to this proposition, that the faith of the gospel, which I have described, is properly justifying and saving faith, I shall do these six things.

1. Shew that justification in Scripture signifies no more than the pardon and remission of sins.

2. That faith can in no propriety of language be said to be the instrument of our pardon.

3. That the influence that the faith of the gospel, which I have described, hath upon the pardon of sin, is this, that it is the whole and entire condition required on our parts, upon the performance of which God hath promised to pardon our sins, and to save us.

4. That the Scripture, where it treats of justification by faith, speaks of this faith which I have described, and no other.

5. That no metaphorical descriptions of justifying faith are allowable, any farther than as they serve to illustrate and make clear the plain and simple notion of the thing. For if metaphors once come to be insisted on, and strained, and conse-

quences come to be drawn from them, and doctrines founded, and theories built upon them, they are of very ill consequence, and serve to no other purpose but to blind and obscure the plain and simple notions of things, and to seduce and mislead the understandings of men, and to multiply controversies without end.

And I the rather take notice of this abuse of metaphors upon this subject, because I do not know any other head of divinity which hath suffered so much by them as the doctrine of justifying faith; whereby the plain truth hath been very much obscured, and occasion ministered to many endless disputes.

6. That if this plain and simple notion of justifying faith were admitted, it would supersede all those controversies about justification, which have so much troubled the church. These particulars I shall by God's assistance speak to, not out of a mind to oppose and contradict others; (what a pitiful design is that! and how much below one that is to speak to men in the name and fear of God!) but out of a hearty desire to bring the truth to light, and to contribute something to the clearing of that which is of so great importance and concernment to Christian religion.

1. That justification of a sinner, in Scripture, signifies no more than the pardon of sin. That there are several acceptations of the word justification in the New Testament, I deny not. Sometimes it signifies approbation in general of a thing, or person. So the word is used, Luke vii. 29. "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John." —"Justified God;" how is that? that is, they ap-

proved and followed his counsel, as appears evidently by the opposition in the next words: "but the pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him." Those that "rejected the counsel of God," are opposed to those that "justified God." And so at the 35th verse, "But wisdom is justified of her children," that is, approved. And so, very probably, it may be understood in the parable of the pharisee and the publican, "I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other;" that is, of the two, God did rather approve of his humble carriage, than the pharisee's proud and insolent behaviour. Sometimes it signifies any proof or declaration of a thing. So, (Rom. iii. 4.) "Let God be true, but every man a liar, as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged;" that is, that all thy words or promises might be proved and declared to be true, and that thou mayest prevail whenever thou art impleaded by men of unfaithfulness and unrighteousness. And so (1 Tim. iii. 16.) Christ is said to be "justified in the Spirit," that is, by the testimony of the Spirit concerning him; as also by the miracles which he wrought by the Holy Ghost, and the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, which were poured forth on the apostles, he was proved and declared to be the true Messias, and the Son of God. And this phrase of Christ's "being justified by the Spirit," seems to be of the same sense with that expression, (Rom. i. 4.) "Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead;" that is, he was evidently proved to be the Son of God, by the great miracle of his resurrection, which was wrought by

the power of the Holy Ghost. But most frequently, to justify, in Scripture, signifies to pardon.

Thus the word justify, doth signify variously, according to the subject or matter it is applied to; but when it is applied to a sinner, it signifies nothing else but pardon of his sin. Nor can I possibly apprehend what other notion men can frame to themselves of a sinner's being justified, distinct from pardon and remission. Indeed, if a person be not really guilty, that is, unjustly accused of a crime, he may be said to be justified, when he is cleared from the charge and accusation which is brought against him: but if a man be guilty, he cannot otherwise be said to be justified, than by having the guilt removed; that is, by being pardoned. And that the Scripture understands the same thing by justification, and pardon, or remission of sins, is, I think, very evident from these two texts: (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) "That through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins;" that is, in and through Jesus Christ, the way of pardon and forgiveness is declared; "and by him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses;" that is, according to this declaration, all that do believe, are by him, that is, by the virtue of his sacrifice, acquitted and cleared from the guilt of all those sins, for which there was no way of expiation provided by the law of Moses, that is, of presumptuous sins, for which there was no sacrifice, but the man was to be cut off. Now if the meaning of this text be this, that in and through Christ the way of pardon and forgiveness is declared, and accordingly all that do believe in him are pardoned, then to be justified and pardoned are all one in this place; but this is the

meaning of the text, if by the phrase of being "justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses," be meant the pardoning of such sins and transgressions, for which, by the law of Moses, there was no way of expiation: but this must of necessity be the meaning of this phrase; for what are those things, from which it is said, "we could not be justified by the law of Moses," but sinful transgressions and violations of the law? and how can a man be said to be justified from any sin and transgression, otherwise than by the pardon and forgiveness of it? The other text is, (Rom. iv. 6—8.) "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered: blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." "The man unto whom God imputeth righteousness," is the man whom God justifies. Now, how does David describe the blessedness of the man whom God justifies? Thus, "Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered," which is a metaphorical expression of the same thing, covering of sin being the pardoning of it. From hence I reason, if according to the apostle those propositions be equivalent, "Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven," and "Blessed is the man whom God justifies," then, according to the apostle, justification and forgiveness of sins are all one: but those propositions are equivalent, if the apostle cite the text out of the Psalms pertinently.

2. That faith can, in no tolerable propriety of language, be said to be the instrument of our pardon, and consequently not of our justification. An

instrument is something subordinate to the principal efficient cause, and made use of by it to produce the effect; and this, in natural and artificial causes, may be understood, but what notion to have of a moral instrument, I confess I am at a loss. But, to bring the business out of the clouds, we may thus conceive of the pardon of sin. God, in the gospel, hath entered into a covenant of grace and mercy with sinners; one of the benefits promised by God in the covenant, is pardon of sin. The conditions upon which we shall be made partakers of the benefit, are comprehended in this one word, faith, which signifies the whole of Christian religion, viz. such an effectual assent to the revelation of the gospel, as doth produce repentance, and sincere obedience, and a trust and confidence in Christ alone for salvation. The procuring or meritorious cause of this benefit, viz. the pardon of our sins, is the death of Christ, which is called his blood or sacrifice. The principal efficient cause of our pardon is God in the sentence of the law, or, which is all one, in the tenor of this covenant, declaring us pardoned upon these terms and conditions. Now how can faith, which is an act on our parts, and the condition to be performed by us, be said to be an instrument, in the hand of God, of our pardon; unless men will think fit to call a condition an instrument, which I think no propriety of language will allow?

I shall now proceed to the third particular which I proposed, but shall refer that to my next discourse on this argument.

SERMON CCXXVI.

OF JUSTIFYING FAITH.

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.—JOHN XX. 31.

THE observation I am discoursing upon is this—that to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is truly and properly sanctifying, and justifying, and saving faith. I have entered upon the latter part of the observation, viz. to shew that this is truly and properly justifying and saving faith. In speaking to which, I proposed to shew six things:

1. That justification, in Scripture, signifies no more but the pardon and remission of sins.

2. That faith can in no propriety of language, be said to be the instrument of our pardon. Thus far I have gone, and now proceed to what remains, viz. to shew,

3. That the influence which faith hath upon the pardon of sin, is this: that it is the whole and entire condition, required in the gospel, of our pardon, upon the performance of which God hath promised to pardon sin; which appears thus. All the conditions the gospel requires on our part in order to pardon, may be reduced to these four heads.

(1.) An assent to the truth of the gospel.

(2.) A trust and confidence in Christ as our only Saviour.

(3.) Repentance from dead works.

(4.) Sincere obedience and holiness of life. But I have already proved at large, that all these are comprehended in the New Testament notion of faith, which signifies the whole of Christian religion. And that repentance and obedience are conditions of our pardon, and consequently of our justification, appears from these texts, (Acts iii. 19.) "Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Doth not this imply, that upon condition we do repent and be converted, God will pardon our sins? (1 John i. 9.) "If we confess our sins" (that is, with a resolution to leave them; as it is said elsewhere, "He that confesseth, and forsaketh his sins,) he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (Matt. vi. 14, 15.) "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." And to the same purpose (Matt. xviii. 35.) "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." (Luke vi. 37.) "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." (Luke xi. 4.) "And forgive us our sins: for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us." Where doth the Scripture make any thing more plainly a condition of pardon, than it here does our forgiving of others? upon condition of the performance whereof he promises to forgive us; and without which he threatens not to forgive us. I know not what a condition is, if it be not that which if we perform we shall receive the benefit promised; if we do not, we shall fall short of it.

4. That the Scripture where it speaks of justification by faith, speaks of this faith, and no other, of such a faith as takes in the whole of Christian religion. The principal places where the Scripture designedly treats of justification by faith, are the 3d and 4th chapters of the Epistle to the Romans; the 2d and 3d to the Galatians; and the 2d of St. James. In the Romans and Galatians, St. Paul doth plainly oppose faith to the law, and the righteousness of it to the works of the law: and it will clearly appear to any one that will carefully read over these discourses of St. Paul's, that by faith is meant the dispensation of the gospel, and by the law the Mosaical administration; and the result of all those discourses is, that men are not justified by performing the works which the legal dispensation required; but by assenting and submitting to the revelation of the gospel. And this is agreeable to what he says, (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) "Through this man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins; and by him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

It is true likewise, that the apostle, in the Epistle to the Romans, doth not only dispute against those who simply contended for justification by the legal dispensation: but were fallen also into the gross error and mistake, that they did merit justification and pardon at God's hand; which is impossible: for pardon is free, and of grace, or else it is not pardon. Therefore the apostle asserts, that we are so justified by faith, that neither our assent to the gospel, nor our obedience to the commands of it, do merit this at God's hands; for this would directly contradict justification by the faith of the gospel. For how can any man possibly think, that

he merits pardon by his believing and obeying the gospel, when this is part of the gospel which we believe, that Christ died for our sins, and purchased our pardon at so dear a rate; which had been very unjust, if we ourselves could have done any thing to have merited it.

And that faith is taken for the revelation of the gospel, in opposition to the legal administrations, will appear by considering these texts, (Gal. iii. 23.) "But before faith came, we were kept under the law;" by which the apostle plainly means this, that before the revelation of the gospel to the world, we were under the legal administration: for he adds afterwards, "We were shut up unto the faith that should afterward be revealed;" and what is "the faith that should afterward be revealed," but the gospel? which in the fulness of time was to be revealed to the world, till which time we were held under the dispensation of the law: and (ver. 24.) "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith;" that is, the law was a discipline preparatory for the gospel, that when that came, we might be justified by it: and (ver. 25.) "But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster," that is after the gospel was revealed, we were set free from the severe and harsh dispensation of the law; and our assent and submission to that revelation, is that whereby we are said to be justified, (Rom. iii. 22.) "Even the righteousness of God, which is by the faith of Jesus Christ," that is, by the gospel, "unto all, and upon all them that believe." And (ver. 26.) "That he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus;" τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ, "the justifier of him" that yields assent and submission to

the gospel of Christ. And this faith is said to be "imputed to us for righteousness," (chap. iv. 24.) "But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;" that is, if we assent and submit to the revelation of the gospel, which God hath confirmed by that eminent miracle of raising up Christ from the dead.

St. James tells us most expressly, that the faith which justifies doth contain obedience in it: and if it do not, it is dead, and false, and ineffectual to all purposes of pardon and salvation: and that if any man pretend to faith, and that faith be destitute of the proper and genuine effects of true faith, it will be unprofitable to him, and not at all avail to his justification and salvation. The sum of his discourse is, that the faith which justifies and saves us, must not only be a bare assent of the understanding to the truths of the gospel: but must include in it obedience to all the commands of the gospel: and if it does not, it does no more deserve the name of faith, than good words to a man in want, deserve the name of charity: (chap. ii. ver. 14—17. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and hath not works? can faith save him? If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." And to this purpose he instanceth in Abraham and Rahab, and shews that the faith which justified them, did include in it the effects of faith, viz. obedience and good works, (ver. 21, 22.) "Was not Abraham our father

justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" And (ver. 23.) "And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness." But if Abraham was "justified by works," viz. by offering up his son upon the altar, in obedience to God's command, as he says before, at the 21st verse, how was "the Scripture fulfilled, which saith, that faith was imputed to him for righteousness," that is, he was justified by faith; unless faith take in the works of obedience? From whence he concludes, "that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only;" not by a naked assent to the truth, but by such a faith as includes obedience; which he farther illustrates by a similitude at the last verse; "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." A living faith doth as truly contain obedience in it, as a living body contains a spirit.

And those distinctions which are commonly applied to this discourse of St. James do not clear it, but contradict the express design of it. Some say that *Fides quæ est viva justificat; sed non qua viva:* Faith which is living, justifies; but not as a living faith. Others say, (which is much to the same purpose) *Fides justificat sine operibus; sed fides sine operibus non justificat:* "Faith justifies without works; but faith without works does not justify." But St. James says expressly, "that we are justified by works." How then is that true, that "faith justifies without works?" And he says that works are the life of our faith. How then can any man say, that "though faith justifies, yet not as it is a

living faith;" when we are justified by that which is the very life of our faith, and that is obedience?

There are two other distinctions whereby men endeavour to elude this plain text, which I did not mention before; "that faith justifies the person; and works justify the faith," and that this is St. James's meaning. But what ground for this, when the text speaks expressly of the person being justified by works, as well as faith? "Was not Abraham our father justified by works?" (ver. 21.) "You see then that by works a man is justified: and not by faith only." (Ver. 24.) "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works?" What colour is here for any man to say, that St. James doth not speak of the justification of the person by works; but of the faith? Or what necessity of framing this distinction, but only to serve an opinion? But at this rate a man may maintain any thing, though it be never so contrary to Scripture, and elude the clearest text in the Bible.

The other distinction, which is much to the same sense, is, that the apostle doth not here speak of a real justification before God: but a declarative justification before men. But according to this, what sense can be made of (ver. 14.) "What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say, I have faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?" That is, according to this explication, Can faith without works save him before men?

And this doth not contradict St. Paul, who saith, (Gal. ii. 16.) that "a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ." For how does this, that we are justified not by the legal dispensation, but by the faith of the gospel, which includes obedience and good works, con-

tradict what St. James says, that we are not justified by a bare assent to the truth of the gospel, but by obedience to the commands of it? And I do not see that upon the contrary supposition, viz. that the faith of the gospel doth not include obedience in it, it is possible to reconcile these two apostles. Suppose this was St. Paul's meaning, that "we are justified by faith," as the only condition and instrument, call it what they will, of our justification; but not by obedience or good works, as a condition of our justification; by what kind of comment can St. James's words be brought to this sense? What man would allow that those words at the 21st verse, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar," should be explained by this sense? Was not Abraham, when in obedience to God's command he had offered his son upon the altar, and upon this act of obedience was justified, was not he justified by faith only, and not by any work or act of obedience? Or that those words at the 24th verse, "Ye see then that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only," should be interpreted, Ye see then that by faith only a man is justified, and not by works? and unless they be thus interpreted, they are not to be reconciled with the sense of St. Paul's words, which many fasten upon them: but if St. Paul's words be taken in the most plain and obvious sense they are capable of, viz. that "we are not justified by the works of the law," that is, by performing the works required by the legal dispensation; "but by the faith of Jesus Christ," that is, by assenting and submitting to the revelation of the gospel; we do not strain St. James's words, to reconcile him with St. Paul.

And thus I have shewn, that where the Scripture

speaks of justification by faith, it speaks of this faith which I have described. I add, and of no other; not of a bare appropriation of the grace and mercy of the gospel; that is, in plain English, this is not justifying faith, to believe that I am pardoned, and justified, nor to have a firm assurance of this. For if we be justified by faith, we must believe before we can be justified; but if this be justifying faith to believe, or be assured we are justified, we must be justified before we believe; or else, when we believe that we are justified, we must believe that which is not true. Nor is this justifying faith, to lay hold of the righteousness and merits of Christ for the pardon of our sins; that is, to trust and confide only in that, as the meritorious cause of our pardon. For though this be part of the notion of justifying faith, it is not all; though this be one of the terms or conditions upon which we are justified; yet it is not the whole and entire condition; which, besides this, takes in an assent to the whole gospel, repentance from dead works, and obedience to all the precepts of the gospel. And if any man can produce any one text which saith, that the faith which justifies, consists only in a trust and confidence in the merits of Christ, for the pardon of sin, or any thing to this effect, I will be most ready publicly to acknowledge my error: but if nobody can do this, I shall beg their pardon, if I do continue still of the same mind I was.

I have now done with the fourth thing I propounded: but before I speak to the two heads which remain, I must remove an objection or two, that my former discourse may seem liable to.

Objection first, To make obedience a condition of pardon seems to take away the freeness of God's grace in pardoning sinners.

1. God's grace in pardoning a sinner is said to be free, not because it is not suspended upon any condition; for the Scripture tells us plainly, that it is upon the condition of faith, and repentance, and forgiving others, and the like; but it is free, because God was pleased freely to give his Son to die for our sins, and to accept of his sacrifice for the expiation of them, and to impose easy and reasonable conditions upon us, in order to our enjoying of this benefit; and upon such conditions, though they have nothing of virtue or merit, of any natural or moral efficacy, or deserve, or procure such a benefit as the pardon of our sins, for the sake of his Son, whom he gave to be a ransom for us, to receive us to grace and mercy; and I think this abundantly enough to make our justification very gracious and free, though not absolutely free from all condition.

Our salvation is said in Scripture to be as free as our justification: we are said to be "saved by grace," as well as "justified freely by his grace." But will any man say, that we are saved without any conditions, who reads these texts? "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life." "Blessed are the poor in heart: for they shall see God." "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." "If ye walk after the flesh, ye shall die: but if through the Spirit ye mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live." "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." So that he who can understand how we may be saved by grace, though our salvation be suspended upon the condition of faith, repentance, and holiness, and obedience of life, may, if he please, understand how we may be justified freely by God's grace, though it be upon the same conditions. So

that if men were not monstrously perverse, it is impossible that they should not see the weakness of this objection.

Objection the second, This is the doctrine of the papists, that obedience and good works are a condition of our justification.

Answ. 1. I am for the doctrine which is evidently contained in Scripture, whoever hold it. A man ought not to be frighted out of the truth by any name.

2. But there is a wide difference between the doctrine of the papists about justification, and this doctrine. They say, that obedience and good works are not only a condition of our justification, but a meritorious cause of it; which I abhor as much as any one. It is the doctrine of merit that the protestants chiefly oppose in the matter of justification; and if some also oppose the papists about good works being a condition, I know nobody that thinks himself obliged to hold every opinion that any protestant hath maintained against the papists; and the like I say to the objection of Socinianism and Arminianism, and a hundred names more, if people think fit to fasten them upon it.

And now I might compare this doctrine with the contrary. All that may be said against it is, that it diminisheth the grace of God: but that I have shewn it doth not: but then it hath these advantages. It is, so far as I can judge, (and mine own judgment must govern me) much more plainly contained in the Scripture, and it is a doctrine more "according to godliness;" it tends more to quicken men to obedience and a holy life, to believe that they cannot have their sins otherwise pardoned, than to believe that they may have their sins pardoned without obedience and a holy life; and if obedience be

not a necessary condition of pardon, it is plain that men may be pardoned without it. For example, if a man promise me a thousand pounds, only upon this condition, that I will believe him and trust him, but without any condition of doing what he shall command me, and he shall declare thus much to me; if I can trust this man's word, I need not doubt but I shall have the sum promised; though I should disobey him in every thing that he commanded me to do: this is just the case; and if it be, it is no wonder that men are so loth to disbelieve this pleasant opinion, which gives men comfortable hopes of the pardon of their sins, upon such easy terms. Not that I am so uncharitable as not to acknowledge that our worthy and excellent divines, who have been of this judgment, have always pressed the necessity of holiness and obedience; but I am sorry they could not do it with so good advantage, according to their principles, the natural consequences of them tending to licentiousness, and a neglect of the precepts of the gospel; to which purpose they have been sadly abused by several libertines in these and former times, ever since Luther's days, and I could never yet see how antinomianism could solidly be confuted upon those principles.

5. That no metaphorical descriptions of justifying faith are allowable any farther than as they serve to illustrate the plain, and proper, and simple notion of faith. My meaning is, he that would teach men what faith is, he must first acquaint men with the thing, and describe it in as proper and simple words as can be, and not by figurative and metaphorical phrases. Indeed, after a man hath delivered the simple notion of a thing in proper words, he may afterwards illustrate it by metaphors: but

then these are not to be insisted upon, and strained to the utmost extent of the metaphor, beyond what the true notion of the thing will bear; for if consequences once come to be drawn from metaphors, and doctrines founded, and theories built upon them, instead of illustrating the thing, they blind and obscure it, and serve to no other purpose, but to seduce and mislead the understandings of men, and to multiply controversies without end; and (as I told you before) I do the rather take notice of this abuse of metaphors upon this subject, because I do not know any other head of divinity which hath suffered so much by them, as the doctrine of justifying faith, whereby the plain truth hath been very much darkened, and occasion ministered to many endless disputes. But this will best appear by some particular instances. Justifying faith hath usually been described by these metaphors, resting, and relying, and leaning upon Christ, apprehending and laying hold, and applying of Christ, receiving of Christ, and coming to him. Now concerning these, I shall briefly speak these three or four things:

(1.) That none of these metaphors, except the two last, receiving of Christ, and coming to him, are any where used in Scripture, to describe justifying faith by; and therefore there is no reason why they should be so much used and insisted on. Let any man shew me where justifying faith is any where in Scripture described by resting, and relying, and leaning upon Christ, by apprehending, and laying hold, and applying of him.

(2.) If these metaphors were explained and turned into proper and plain words, they can signify nothing else, but that faith which I have been all this while describing. For what can any man under-

stand by resting, and relying, and leaning upon Christ, but to trust in him, as the author of our eternal salvation, under which word all the benefits which Christ hath purchased for us are comprehended? Now can any man be said to trust in Christ, as the author of his salvation, otherwise than by assenting to the truth of the gospel, and complying with the terms and conditions of it? And what can any man understand by apprehending, and laying hold on, and applying Christ, other than this, to make use of him for all those ends and purposes for which God hath appointed him? And what those are the Scripture tells us: that "he is made unto us of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

(3.) As for those Scripture metaphors of receiving Christ, and coming to him, the Scripture useth them but sparingly, and I dare say, for once that it useth these metaphors, it doth twenty times describe faith by plain and proper words; and where it doth make use of these metaphors, it doth sufficiently explain them. So you find coming to Christ is explained by learning of him: (Matt. xi. 28, 29.) "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." That is, Come to me as scholars and disciples to be taught by me; in order to which it is requisite we should believe him. *Oportet discentem credere*, "He that will learn, must believe him that teacheth him," and trust his skill. And so for receiving him, lest the metaphor should seduce men, St. John had no sooner used it, but he tells what he means by it. (John i. 12.) "But as many as re-

ceived him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;" that is, believed him to be the person promised to be the Messias, and Saviour of the world; as appears by the opposition in the verse before: "He came to his own, and his own received him not;" that is, rejected him, did not own him to be the true Messias. But now if we will strain such a metaphor as this, beyond the intention of it, and because believing is called a receiving of Christ, and we receive things with the hand, and the hand is an instrument, will from hence infer, that faith is an instrument of our justification; what may not men make of the Scripture at this rate?

(4.) I will add this concerning Scripture metaphors in general, that where the Scripture useth metaphors which were very familiar in those languages in which the Scripture was written, and well understood by those who spoke that language, but are very obscure and uncouth to us, and not at all used in our language, as most of the Scripture metaphors are, the proper work of a minister is not to insist in such cases upon Scripture metaphors, to darken his discourse by them, but to explain them, and make them intelligible, to translate them into English, and instead of them, to use such phrases as people are more familiarly acquainted with, and are used in our own language. For a man may be a barbarian that speaks to people in unknown phrases and metaphors, as well as "he that speaks in an unknown tongue;" and the very same reason that obligeth us to put the Scripture into a known language, doth oblige men to explain the doctrines contained in it by such phrases and metaphors as are known and used in that language.

6. That if this plain and simple notion of justifying faith were admitted, it would supersede all those controversies about justification, which have so much troubled the reformed churches. Those who have been curious to inquire into these matters, have reckoned up at least twenty several opinions among the protestants concerning justifying faith. I do not desire to acquaint myself with those differences; he that would know what justification and justifying faith are, shall sooner come to understand the nature of them, by diligent reading of the Scriptures, than by reading over all the controversial writings of divines about them; and if men would but content themselves with those plain and simple descriptions, which the Scripture gives us of faith, there could not be any great difference about it; this would cut off most of those disputes which have been commenced upon metaphors, and figurative speeches. And here I had thought to have descended to a particular consideration of the controversies about justifying faith, but I am weary of the work; and therefore shall only make some brief reflections upon this whole discourse, and then apply it to our own use; but this, God willing, the next opportunity.

SERMON CCXXVII.

THE CONDITION OF THE GOSPEL-COVENANT, AND THE MERIT OF CHRIST, CONSISTENT.

But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name. — JOHN XX. 31.

I HAVE in my former discourses on these words, treated largely of the nature of Christian faith; particularly as it sanctifies, justifies, and saves men. All that I farther propose is, to make some reflections upon this whole discourse, particularly that which relates to justifying faith, and then apply all to our own use.

I have already taken notice of two objections, to which my discourse may seem liable; and if there yet remain any prejudice upon any man's spirit against this doctrine, I would desire such calmly to consider it, and the agreeableness of it, not to the opinions of men, but to the word of God, and the suitableness of it to the great design of Christian religion, every where expressed in the gospel, which is to bring men to holiness and obedience. And what argument and consideration can be more powerful to take men off from sin, and to excite them to the practice of holiness, than this, that repentance and obedience are an indispensable condition of our justification and pardon? And this is the very point in difference, whether the gospel

do not make repentance and obedience the conditions of our pardon and justification, as well as an assent to the truth of the gospel, and a trust in Christ as the meritorious cause of our salvation. That they are, I have endeavoured to prove from Scripture; and, for the farther clearing of it, I desire that the nature of the gospel covenant may be well considered, which I take to be this. On God's part, there are certain benefits promised, justification and pardon of sin, and eternal life and salvation. On our part there are certain conditions required before we can be made partakers of those benefits; these are, to assent to the truth of the gospel, trusting in Christ as our only Saviour, repentance from dead works, and a sincere purpose and resolution of obedience, and a holy life; these make up the whole and entire condition of the gospel, and are often expressed by this one word, faith, which signifies the whole duty of a Christian; because he that truly believes the gospel, will do whatever the gospel requires. And hence it is, that to be a Christian, and to be a believer, are in the phrase of the New Testament all one. Now the matter in controversy is plainly this; whether this whole condition be required of us in order to our pardon and justification, as well as in order to our salvation. That repentance, and obedience, and holiness of life, are conditions of our salvation, I think, is universally agreed; I am sure it is clearly expressed in these two texts—"Christ is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him;" (Heb. v. 9.) "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" (Heb. xii. 14.) And that the conditions of our justification and salvation are the same, I think is every whit as clear, both from Scripture, and from

the general acknowledgment of divines, by necessary consequence. From Scripture: St. James says, that the same thing that justifies us, saves us; for when he disputes, whether we are justified by faith only, or by faith and works, he hath this expression, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works; can faith save him?" From whence the inference is plain, that upon the very same condition that we are justified, we are saved. And it is evident, by necessary consequence, from the general acknowledgment of divines; for I think this is universally agreed by divines, that whatever puts a man into a state of justification and pardon, puts a man into a state of salvation; and if this be true, it necessarily follows, that the conditions of our justification and salvation are the same: and if assent to the truth of the gospel, and trust in Christ as our only Saviour, be the only conditions of our justification, then they are the only conditions of our salvation; and repentance and obedience are not conditions of our salvation: but if they be conditions of our salvation, then they are of our justification. And I will be bold to say, that this hath as much of demonstration in it, as any thing in divinity is capable of; and I wonder extremely how any man that considers the nature of the gospel covenant, can imagine that we should be made partakers of any blessing or benefit promised in the covenant, without performing the whole condition of the covenant.

And now, if any man ask, *Cui bono?* To what end is all this? Suppose it be true, to what purpose is it to awaken differences, and stir up controversies about these matters? In order to these two ends, which I take to be very considerable.

1. That we may be able to answer the papists, who charge us with solifidianism: as if we were of this opinion—that if a man do but trust in Christ, that is, be but confidently persuaded that he will save him and pardon him, this is sufficient; and consequently, he that is thus persuaded, need not take any farther care of his salvation, but may live as he list: and I do not see how this can be avoided; especially if this be true, which our divines universally assert, that whatever puts a man into a justified state, puts him into a state of salvation; I say, I do not see how this charge can be avoided, unless we own holiness and obedience to be conditions of our justification, as well as trust in Christ. I know no other middle way between popery and antinomianism. But,

2. Which is more considerable, Without this we can give no satisfactory and reasonable account of our religion to a heathen. Suppose a heathen should say thus; Your religion gives a very good account of the corruption and sinfulness of mankind, and hath provided a very probable remedy for the expiation of it, by the death of the Son of God: but this seems to me very unreasonable, and to contradict the most natural notions that we have of God's justice and holiness, that he should pardon men, as you say he does, though they do not repent of their sins, nor are resolved to leave them, nay, though they be resolved to go on in a wicked course. Did ever any wise prince pardon a traitor upon these terms? But whoever says that repentance, and a sincere purpose and resolution of obedience are not the condition of our pardon, says, that God will pardon men without repentance, though they are not at all sorry for what they have

done, nor resolved to change their course: for that is a condition without which a thing cannot be; and if repentance be not a condition of pardon, a man may be pardoned without it. And if this be true, Christianity is the most lewd and senseless doctrine in the world. For what can be a greater encouragement to sin than this, to tell men that they may be pardoned without repentance? That is, though they live in sin, and continue so to do. Paganism never taught any such thing. Nay, they may add farther, that this which you teach as the doctrine of your religion, seems expressly contrary to your own books, which you say contain your religion. Does not the Bible say, that "he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy?" And doth not this plainly imply, that repentance is a condition of pardon? "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Doth it not say, that "if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you?" Can any words more plainly express a condition than these do?—How should we be able to defend our religion against such an assault, unless we disclaim this charge, and tell them plainly, and without a distinction, that our religion teacheth that repentance, and resolution of holiness, and obedience, are conditions of our pardon and justification? I would to God men would consult the honour of Christianity, and when they hold any opinion, they would not consider the interest of a party, but the universal concernment of the Christian religion! If we had to deal with subtle heathens, as the primitive fathers of the church had, we

should see a necessity of laying aside such unreasonable opinions. I would fain have any man shew any one clear passage out of any of the ancient fathers and writers concerning Christian religion, which says, that trust in Christ for salvation is the only condition of our justification, and that repentance and obedience are not; or that explains justification by faith alone, in this sense. I know it is usually said, the ancient fathers and Christians were ignorant of the doctrine of justification in a great measure, and knew very little of the mystery of the gospel. I know not what they mean by mystery, but I am sure they defined Christian religion better, and gave a more reasonable and satisfactory account of it, than any of those do who are so apt to slight them.

The use of this doctrine is as follows:

First, To persuade men to place all their hope and confidence of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God; that is, to believe that through the alone merit of his death and sufferings, God is reconciled to us, and that only upon the account of the satisfaction which he hath made to Divine justice, we are restored to the favour of God, and our sins are pardoned to us, and we have a title to eternal life. Not but that there are conditions required on our part, to make us capable of these benefits, faith and repentance, and sincere obedience and holiness of life, without which we shall never be made partakers of them: but that the satisfaction of Christ is the only meritorious cause of these blessings. And to persuade men to the belief of this, I shall endeavour to satisfy them of these two things:

I. That Christ hath properly merited these blessings for us.

II. That he only hath done it. The first of these propositions is directly levelled against the Socinians: the second against the papists. I shall speak but briefly of them.

I. That Christ hath properly merited these blessings for us: and this being purely matter of revelation, we are to rely upon Scripture only for the proof of it. (Matt. xx. 28.) "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many," λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν, "a price of redemption," instead of that which should have been paid by us. (John vi. 51.) "And the bread which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John x. 11.) Christ is called "the good shepherd that lays down his life for his sheep." (John xv. 12, 13.) "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (Matt. xxvi. 28.) "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins." (Rom. v. 6.) "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." (1 Cor. xv. 3.) "For I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." (2 Cor. v. 14, 15.) "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." (Eph. i. 7.) "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace." (Col. i. 20—22.) "And (having made peace through the blood of

his cross) by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled, in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable, and unreprovable in his sight." (1 Thess. v. 9, 10.) " For God hath not appointed us to wrath; but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us." (Heb. ii. 9.) " That he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." (Heb. ix. 11—15.) " But Christ being come a high-priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." And, (ver. 25—28.) " Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high-priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others: for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed

unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him, shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." (Heb. x. 11, 12.) "And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God." (1 Pet. i. 18, 19.) "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers: but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Pet. ii. 21. 24.) "Because Christ also suffered for us; who his own self bare our sins, in his own body, on the tree." (1 Pet. iii. 18.) "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." (1 John ii. 1, 2.) "My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John iii. 16.) "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren," (1 John iv. 10.) "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (Rev. i. 5.) "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins by his own blood." (Rev. v. 9.) "Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." From these and many other texts, it seems to be

very plain and evident, that Christ died for our sins, and suffered in our stead, and by the sacrifice of himself has made an atonement for us, and reconciled us to God, and hath paid a price and ransom for us, and by the merit of his death hath purchased for us forgiveness of sins, and "inheritance among them that are sanctified." And I do not know any doctrine of our religion, that is founded and established upon more and plainer texts, which cannot be understood in any other sense, without offering great violence to the first and most obvious meaning of them.

I know the Socinians have framed evasions to all these texts, which I have not time now to produce and examine; nor would it be worth the while. I shall only say this to them in general; that there is no principle of religion so plainly laid down in the whole Scripture, but may be overthrown by the same or the like evasions. Suppose Christ had died in our stead, and made satisfaction for sin, and God had intended to declare so much to us; in what plainer and more express and proper words could he have done it, than the Scripture hath already done? If God had said in the Scripture expressly that "Christ had died in our place and stead, and had satisfied for our sins;" these very expressions, by the same arts of interpretation, might have been strained and wrested to some other sense. So that if God did not intend to express to us by these texts, that "Christ satisfied for the sins of men;" yet they are so obvious to be interpreted to that sense, and so hardly, if at all, capable of any other, that we cannot imagine, without a great reflection upon the wisdom of God, that he should deliver his mind to men in words and expressions so exceedingly

liable to a quite different sense from what he intended. Besides that there is nothing more unreasonable than to deny that to be the meaning of Scripture, which if it had been the meaning could not have been expressed in plainer and more advantageous words; especially when this is done, not in one or two texts, but very many; and not by one form of expression, but several, and all inclining to the same sense; and, which is worst of all, this violence is offered to Scripture in a matter which does neither contradict other texts, nor the reason of mankind, viz. that one man should suffer in another's stead, and make satisfaction for the crimes and faults which another hath committed; supposing the party offended be willing to accept of the commutation, and the party that suffers in another's stead do voluntarily do it.

II. That Christ only hath merited these blessings for us, and that he had no partner with him in this; or there is no other hath merited these blessings for us, nor can we ourselves merit them.

1. No other hath merited these blessings for us. Not to take notice of what the papists say, of the meritoriousness of our works of supererogation, which go into the treasury of the church, and make up a public stock of merit, to be disposed and dealt out by the pope at his discretion; they have by a most unparalleled blasphemy joined the Virgin Mary with Christ in the work of our redemption; and some of them have been so impiously bold, as to parallel the virtue of her milk with the efficacy of Christ's blood. And though Christ say, "that he trod the wine-press of his Father's wrath alone, and of the people there was none with him;" yet Bonaventure in his meditations ventures to corrupt the

text by this foolish gloss, *Nullus erat tecum. Recte, Domine, sed erat tecum femina;* "Right, Lord, there was no man with thee, but there was a woman, viz. thy mother."

2. Nor can we ourselves do any thing whereby we can merit these blessings at God's hand. Considering that we received our being, and all that we are and have from God, and upon account of these benefits are obliged to love him and serve him to the utmost; what a senseless piece of arrogance is it to say, that a creature can merit any thing at God's hand? Whatever we give God is of his own, and when we have done all we can, we have done no more than our duty. And can any man challenge a reward for doing what he ought to do? Can any man make satisfaction for a fault that he hath committed, by doing his duty, that is, by not committing another? It is a sure rule, *debitum debito non solvitur.* We are indebted to God by the breach of his law: but we cannot quit this debt, and satisfy for this breach, by not breaking it again, because we owe to God all possible obedience.

Besides that all our obedience is imperfect, and is so far from meriting, that it stands in need of pardon; and can a man demerit and merit by the same action? Can he who deserves to be punished for an action, because he did it no better, deserve to be rewarded for the same action, because he did it so well? And to say that Christ hath merited that our imperfect obedience should merit, either signifies only this, that Christ hath merited that our imperfect obedience should be accepted by God, notwithstanding its imperfection (and this is true, but nothing to the purpose of merit); or else it signifies, that Christ hath merited that that which is no wise

meritorious, should be so; that is, that the nature of things should be altered; which is not only false, but senseless.

Secondly, To persuade us to live as we believe. If we profess to believe the gospel to be true, then let our hearts and lives be suitable to those truths which we believe. If we believe Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God, we believe the doctrine which he delivered to the world to be from God, and consequently to be true; we believe the precepts of it are holy, and just, and good, and that they are necessary to be observed by us, as being in order to our peace and happiness; we believe that the promises of the gospel are "all yea, and amen," and shall every tittle of them be made good; we believe that the threatenings of the gospel shall all punctually be fulfilled. Now how ought men to live, that believe all this? Having a law given us which hath the sanction of such promises and threatenings, ought we not to conform our lives to it; and charge ourselves with obedience to all those precepts of piety towards God, and purity and temperance in the government of ourselves, and justice and righteousness in our dealings with others, which are contained in this new law of the gospel? If the gospel hath promised eternal life and happiness to those who do conscientiously abstain from sin, and follow holiness; having these promises, ought we not "to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God?" If the gospel hath threatened, that at the end of the world, Christ will "come in flaming fire," &c. if we believe these things shall be, "what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?"

I have formerly shewed at large, how unbecoming it is for any man that professeth himself a Christian, to live unsuitable to his profession, that it is the greatest disparagement to the gospel, and the highest reflection upon it that can be; and that it is infinitely dangerous to us; and though these be very proper considerations, yet, because I have formerly urged them, I shall not now enforce my exhortation with these arguments; but shall mention two other considerations, and so conclude.

First, If our lives be not answerable to our belief, our faith will be ineffectual to all intents and purposes.

Secondly, A life unsuitable to our belief, is the high way to infidelity and atheism.

First, If our lives be not answerable to our belief, our faith will be ineffectual to all real intents and purposes.

1. It will be ineffectual to give us the reputation of Christians among wise and discerning persons. We profess to believe the gospel; but if we live contrary to it, our profession is *protestatio contra factum*, and therefore not credible; because our actions contradict it. The constant tenor of a man's actions is a more credible and emphatical declaration of the inward sense of his heart, and shews better what the man believes, than the most solemn profession in words. When our words are not confirmed by our actions, they are but an empty sound, and signify nothing. I may allude to that of St. Paul, (1 Cor. xiii. 2.) "Though a man have all faith," yet, if he be destitute of the true effect of faith, "charity, he is but as a sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal." St. James doth very well set forth the inefficacy of such a faith, by this similitude, (James

ii. 15—17.) "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit? even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead." Men are not so easily cozened as we think they are. Discerning men will not be imposed upon, and put off with a formal and empty profession of faith, when there is nothing in our lives to answer it. It is not standing up in the church, and professing that we believe in God, and in Jesus Christ, that he was born, and died, and rose again, and at the end of the world will come to judge the quick and the dead, that will persuade men that we are Christians. Men will look into our lives, and examine our actions, and inquire into our conversations: by these they will judge of the truth and reality of our profession. Let us not delude ourselves, and think to pass for Christians upon these terms, among any that know how to make a true judgment of things. We may cozen ourselves; but we cannot cheat others, who are not so partial to us as we are apt to be to ourselves. It is not our winking that hinders others from seeing us.

Nay, I go farther, it is not an earnest contending for fundamental articles of our Christian faith, if we live contrary to them, that will satisfy any wise man that we believe them; much less an intemperate zeal for indifferent opinions in religion. Such were the doctrines concerning the necessity on the one hand, and the unlawfulness of circumcision on the other; but the assent to the one opinion or the other in these matters, "neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith that worketh

by love, the new creature, the keeping of the commandments of God," as the apostle in several places expresseth it. Men stand much upon the title of orthodox, by which is usually understood, not believing the doctrine of Christ or his apostles, but such opinions as are in vogue among such a party, such systems of divinity as have been compiled in haste by those whom we have in admiration; and whatever is not consonant to these little bodies of divinity, though possibly it agree well enough with the word of God, is error and heresy; and whoever maintains it, can hardly pass for a Christian among some angry and perverse people. I do not intend to plead for any error; but I would not have Christianity chiefly measured by matters of opinion. I know no such error and heresy as a wicked life. That man believes the gospel best, who lives most according to it. Though no man can have a worse opinion of the Socinian doctrine than I have, yet I had rather a man should deny the satisfaction of Christ, than believe it, and abuse it to the encouragement of sin. Of the two I have more hopes of him that denies the divinity of Christ, and lives otherwise soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world, than of the man who owns Christ to be the Son of God, and lives like a child of the devil.

2. Such a faith as hath not an answerable life, will be ineffectual to the purpose of justification and salvation. St. James tells us, it is "a dead faith, and profits nothing," that no man is justified by it, nor will it save any man. Christ is the author of eternal salvation to them who so believe his doctrine as to obey it. He will come in flaming fire, to render vengeance not only to them that do not be-

lieve, but to them that do not obey the gospel. It will not be sufficient at the day of judgment, to plead our profession of faith in Christ, and to say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name have done many wondrous works?" Doing all this in Christ's name, implies that they profess to believe in him: but notwithstanding all this, if they be "workers of iniquity," Christ will say to such, "Depart from me, I know you not." If our Saviour makes a true and proper representation of the day of judgment, and the proceedings of it, (Matt. xxv.) men's faith shall then be tried by the real fruits and effects of it; then the inquiry shall be, how men have lived; what good they have done, or omitted and neglected? and accordingly sentence will be passed upon them. Nay, such a faith is so far from saving, that it will be an aggravation of our condemnation, and sink us the deeper into hell. "There is one that condemneth you, even Jesus in whom ye trust."

Secondly, A life unsuitable to our belief is the high way to infidelity and atheism, to bring others and ourselves to it.

1. To bring others to infidelity and atheism, and to confirm them in it. What can be a more effectual bar to keep heathens, and Jews, and Turks, from entertaining the gospel? What can be a greater confirmation of them in their infidelity, than so to misrepresent Christian religion to them, as we do by our unsuitable lives? What can be a stronger prejudice against it, to men who do not look narrowly into it, but only see it at a distance, than to see what fruit it produces in the lives of Christians? May they not invert that proverbial speech of our Saviour's, "Does a vine send forth thorns?" If

Christianity were such a holy institution, how comes it to pass that Christians are so wicked? If Jesus Christ were so excellent a master, we should see it in his scholars; *Si Christus sancta docuisset, Christiani sancte vixissent,* as Salvian speaks. And it is the way to bring men to atheism. What more likely to take a man off from all religion, than to see the religion which pretends to be the best in the world, represented by the lives of Christians at such a disadvantage, as if it were a barren and fruitless and ineffectual thing, and as if they who profess it, did believe it to be a lie, and gave no credit at all to the doctrines of it?

2. It is the way to bring ourselves to infidelity and atheism. As an erroneous judgment and understanding hath usually an evil influence upon men's lives, so much more a vicious and corrupt life hath a bad influence upon men's understandings. It is so uneasy a thing for men to act contrary to their reason, and against the dictates of their understandings, that men for their own quiet, and in their own defence, will bend their judgments, and make them comply with the interest of their lusts. Men's affections, which way soever they incline, set a bias upon their understandings; and this doth not only proceed from the nature of the thing, but from the just judgment of God: (2 Thess. ii. 10—12.) the apostle tells us, "that those who receive not the truth in the love of it, that they may be saved; God will send them strong delusions, to believe lies; that they all may be damned, who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness." If men once "have pleasure in unrighteousness," it will not be long before they give over "believing the truth," because God by his just judgment will give

them over to themselves, to follow the bias of their own corrupt hearts, which incline them to believe lies. Of all persons in the world, a wicked and unholy Christian is most likely to turn a speculative infidel and atheist; and none so likely to fall into this gross darkness, as those who resist and quench so great a light as that of the gospel is, which they profess to believe.

SERMON CCXXVIII.

OF THE MIRACLES WROUGHT IN CONFIRMATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.—HEB. ii. 4.

WHOEVER impartially considers the Christian religion, cannot but acknowledge the laws and precepts of it to be so reasonable; and the practice of them so evidently to tend not only to the happiness of particular persons, but to the peace and welfare of the world; and the promises and threatenings of the gospel, which are the great motives to persuade men to the obedience of those laws, to be so agreeable to the natural hopes and fears which mankind were always possessed withal; that upon this consideration, it might justly be expected, that the doctrine of Christianity, upon the first publication of it, should have been entertained with a readiness of mind proportionable to the reasonableness of it.

Or if the bare reasonableness of it be not thought inducement enough, we may easily imagine, how God, if he had pleased, could, upon the first appearance of this religion in the world, have given it such advantages, as would mightily have contributed to the more easy reception and entertainment of it. He could have ordered things so, that our blessed Saviour, the author of this doctrine, should have been, as the Jews expected, a great temporal mo-

narch; he could have raised him to that dignity, and have armed him with that authority, as must have given him a mighty power and influence over mankind, and would have gained the great, and the wise, and the learned, to have been active instruments in the propagating of this religion, and in persuading men to the embracing of it.

But he, "whose ways are above our ways, and whose thoughts are above our thoughts, as the heavens are above the earth," did not think fit to have it promoted and carried on this way; nay, he seems on purpose to have stripped it of all secular advantages, that it might be perfectly free from all suspicion of a worldly interest and design, and that it might be evident to all the world, that it was "a plant which his own right hand had planted;" and that it did not owe its establishment to the authority, and wisdom, and contrivance of men, but to the power of God, and to the immediate favour and contrivance of Heaven.

And now, being thus destitute of all worldly assistance, though never so reasonable in itself, it was not likely that it should be able with success to grapple with the lusts and corruptions of men, to which it was so directly opposite; nor with the strong prejudices of their education in a contrary religion, which are always hard to be overcome; nor with the temporal interests of men, which were all at that time to be renounced and quitted for its sake; unless it had some other advantages to make way for it, and to recommend it to the minds of men. For, having no secular baits and allurements to tempt men to the profession of it; no earthly contrivance and assistance to support it and bear it out, but, on the contrary, the most violent and powerful opposi-

tion raised against it; it was necessary that those who offered it to the world, should be able to give credit to it some other way, and to produce very sensible and convincing arguments of another kind: otherwise they might have despaired of ever conquering the prejudices of men against it, and of persuading them to embrace that religion, which was so apparently contrary both to their inclinations and interests.

So that in these circumstances, in order to the full conviction of men, that those who published this doctrine to them came from God, and were commissioned and sent by him to teach the world, it was very fitting, that God himself should give some remarkable testimony to the first preachers of it; and this the text tells us he did, by "bearing witness to them, with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost."

For the better understanding of these words, we shall do well to reflect upon the design of this Epistle, which was to establish the Jews, who had but newly embraced Christianity, in the steadfast belief and profession of it, notwithstanding the troubles and persecutions which attended it; and to this end the apostle represents to them that the gospel was delivered with more authority, and had a greater confirmation given to it, than the law. The law was delivered by angels; but the gospel by the Son of God: and if the contempt of the law was so severely punished, what might they expect would be the fate of those who should slight and reject the gospel? "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at first began

to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" Συνεπιμαρτυροῦντος τοῦ θεοῦ, "God adjoining this farther testimony of signs and wonders." The apostles testified what they had heard from our Lord; and to give credit and confirmation to their testimony, God was pleased to endow them with miraculous gifts; "he bare them witness with signs, and wonders, and miracles." So likewise Acts xiv. 3. it is said, that "God gave testimony to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by the apostles." Sometimes there are more words put together, to express the giving of this miraculous power: (Acts ii. 22.) "Jesus of Nazareth, approved of God by miracles, and wonders, and signs." (2 Cor. xii. 12.) St. Paul speaking of himself says, "The signs of an apostle were wrought among you, in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and miracles." These were the marks of an extraordinary and immediate commission, such as was that of the apostles.

It is to no purpose nicely to inquire into the difference of these words, σημεῖα τέρατα δυνάμεις; "signs, wonders, and miracles," because in all probability there is no difference intended, it being the manner of the Hebrews, when they would express a great thing, or a great degree of any thing, to heap several words together, signifying the same thing. So we find, (Deut. vi. 5.) "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might;" that is, greatly, with a very ardent and intense degree of affection. So likewise in the text, God is said to "bear witness to the

apostles, with signs, and wonders, and miracles;" that is, in a very eminent and extraordinary manner, by great and wonderful miracles.

From these words three things offer themselves to our consideration.

First, That miracles are a Divine testimony given to a person or doctrine; "God bearing them testimony, by signs, and wonders, and miracles."

Secondly, That God gave this testimony to the apostles and first preachers of Christianity, in a very eminent manner: for so the phrase signifies, so many words being multiplied to express the greatness of the thing.

Thirdly, We will consider the reason why miracles are now ceased in the church, and have been for several ages, so that there have been no footsteps of them for a long time.

First, That miracles are a Divine testimony given to a person or doctrine. God is here said "to bear witness to the apostles, with signs, and wonders, and divers miracles;" that is, the miracles which God enabled them to work, were an evidence that their doctrine was from God.

And because there is some difficulty in this argument, therefore, that we may the more distinctly understand of what force this argument or testimony of miracles is, to prove the divinity of any person or doctrine, it will be requisite clearly to state these two things:

I. What a miracle is.

II. In what circumstances, and with what limitations, miracles are a sufficient testimony to the truth and divinity of any doctrine. The clearing of these two things shall be my work at this time.

I. What a miracle is. The shortest and plainest

description I can give of it, is this: that it is a supernatural effect, evident and wonderful to sense. So that there are two things necessary to a miracle.

1. That it be a supernatural effect.

2. That it be evident and wonderful to sense.

1. That it be a supernatural effect. By a supernatural effect, I mean such an effect, as either in itself, and in its own nature, or in the manner and circumstances of it, exceeds any natural power that we know of to produce it. For there are some things that are miraculous in themselves; others that are only miraculous in the manner and circumstances of their operation. For instance: the resurrection of one from the dead, is a thing which in itself is supernatural, and an effect above any power that we know of in nature to produce; but the healing of several diseases, and the speaking of languages, are not things which are in themselves and in their nature supernatural: for we see that they may be acquired by natural skill and industry: but to heal all sorts of diseases, in an instant, and by a word, and without the application of natural means; and on a sudden to speak languages which a man never learned; these are things which, though they be not in their nature, yet in such circumstances as these, they are supernatural.

I say, that a supernatural effect, is that which is above any natural power that we know of to produce; by which I do not mean, that miracles are always an immediate effect of the Divine power, and consequently that God alone can work them. For angels, good or bad, may do such things as exceed any natural power known to us, and such as we cannot distinguish by any certain marks and characters from those effects which are wrought by

the immediate power of God; and if we cannot distinguish them they are equally miracles to us. When the angel slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians in one night, this ought in all reason to be reckoned a miracle; and yet this, though done by the command of God, an angel might do by his own power and strength; for "they excel in strength:" but what limitations to set to their power, we cannot tell, only it is finite; so that excepting those things, which the Scripture hath peculiarly appropriated to God, we cannot say what it is that an angel cannot do.

The same may be said concerning evil angels. The devil may work wonders, or assist his instruments to work them. So Pharaoh's magicians wrought several miracles by the power of the devil, and did some of the very same things that Moses and Aaron did, either really or in appearance, and it is all one whether. For he who to men's senses turns a rod into a serpent, works as great a miracle to me, as he who really does it; and if I am not to believe a thing to be a miracle, when to my senses it appears to be wrought, I am never to believe any, unless I could make some difference between those miracles which are real, and those that only appear to be wrought; for if we know not how to distinguish them, they are to us all one as if they were real: but if they may be distinguished, then there will be need of another miracle, to shew which are real and which not: and the same question and doubt will arise about that miracle, and so without end.

So that I do not see what is gained by saying, that Pharaoh's magicians did only delude men's senses, but did not turn their rods really into ser-

pents, as Aaron did his; because this may be said on one side, as well as on the other: for to the standers-by there was no difference, but the one seemed to the senses of the beholders to be as real as the other; and the text makes no difference, but says, "the magicians did in like manner; for they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents," only Aaron's had this advantage, that "his rod swallowed up their rods:" but the main difference was here, Moses and Aaron wrought such miracles, as the magicians could not work, neither really, nor in appearance: for when Aaron by smiting the dust with his rod, had turned it into lice, it is said that the magicians attempted to do so with their enchantments, but could not, and then they yielded and acknowledged that it was "the finger of God." And if they had not been thus plainly overcome, but could to all appearance of sense, have done all those things which Moses and Aaron did, it might justly have been disputed which had been the true prophets.

So that the devil and his instruments may work miracles. Moses plainly supposeth that a false prophet, who comes to seduce the people to idolatry, may work a true sign or wonder. (Deut. xiii. 1, 2.) "If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder; and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods." And our blessed Saviour expressly foretells, (Matt. xxiv.) that false Christs and false prophets shall arise after his death, and shew great signs and wonders.

From all which it is evident, that it is not of the essence of a miracle (as many have thought), that it

be an immediate effect of the Divine power. It is sufficient, that it exceed any natural power that we know of to produce it. And if such effects be not to be esteemed miracles, a miracle would signify nothing; because no man could know when it is wrought, nor distinguish it from those effects which appear to be miraculous, but are not. This is the first property or condition of a miracle, that it be supernatural; that is, such an effect as exceeds any natural power that we know of to produce it. But then,

2. There is another condition also required to a miracle, that it be an effect evident and wonderful to sense: for if we do not see it, it is to us as if it were not, and can be no testimony or proof of any thing, because itself stands in need of another miracle to give testimony to it, and to prove that it was wrought; and neither in Scripture, nor profane authors, nor in common use of speech, is any thing called a miracle, but what falls under the notice of our senses; a miracle being nothing else but a thing wonderful to sense; and the very end and design of it is to be a sensible proof and conviction to us of something which we do not see.

And for want of this condition, transubstantiation, if it were true, would be no miracle; it would indeed be very supernatural; but for all that, it would not be a sign or wonder; for a sign or wonder is always a sensible thing, something that is wonderful and astonishing to sense, otherwise it is no sign or wonder. That such a change as is pretended in transubstantiation should really be wrought, and yet there should be no sign and appearance of it, is a thing very wonderful; but not to sense: for our senses perceive no change; the

bread and wine to all our senses remaining just as they were before. Now that a thing should remain to all appearance just as it was, hath nothing at all of wonder in it. We wonder indeed when we see a strange thing done: but no man wonders when he sees nothing done.

So that to speak the truth, transubstantiation, if they will have it a miracle, is such a miracle as any man may work that hath but confidence to face men down that he works it, and the fortune to be believed. And however they of the church of Rome are wont to magnify their priests, chiefly upon the account of this miracle, which they say they can work every day, and every hour if they please; yet I cannot understand, how it magnifies them so much; for when this great work (as they call it) is done, there is nothing more appears to be done, than if there were no miracle. Now such a miracle as to all appearance is no miracle, I see no reason why a protestant minister may not work as often as he pleaseth, as well as they: or if he can but have the patience to let it alone, it will work itself: for certainly nothing in the world is easier than to let a thing be as it is, and by speaking a few words over it, to make it just what it was before. In short, a miracle is a wonder to sense, and where a man sees nothing that is strange done, there is no miracle; for if he will call it a miracle, when things remain just as they were, and no sensible change is made in them, every man may every day work a thousand such miracles. I come now, in the

II. Second place, to consider in what circumstances, and with what cautions and limitations miracles do give testimony to the truth and divinity

of any doctrine; for instance, of the Christian doctrine: and for the clearing of this matter, I shall lay down these propositions:

1. That the entire proof of the Christian doctrine or religion, consisting of many considerations, when taken together, make up a full demonstration of the truth of it, when perhaps no one of them, taken singly and by itself, is a convincing and undeniable proof.

The Christian religion hath all the characters of divinity upon it which any religion can be expected to have; whether we consider the doctrine of it, in which there is nothing unworthy of God; for it makes such a representation of God, and gives such directions concerning his worship, as are most agreeable to those apprehensions which the wisest men always had of God, and of that service which is most proper to be given to him. Indeed it declares something concerning God, which is very mysterious and past our comprehensions; but this ought not to offend us, since natural light always did acknowledge the Divine nature to be incomprehensible.

The precepts likewise of this religion are highly reasonable, and such as plainly tend to the perfection and happiness of human nature; and the arguments to enforce these precepts, are not only very powerful in themselves, but very suitable to the natural hopes and fears of men.

Or if we consider the author of this doctrine, our blessed Saviour, he will appear to be a Divine person, "and a teacher sent from God," by the clear predictions concerning him long before he came, which, when he came, were exactly fulfilled in him; by the miracles he wrought to give testi-

mony of him; by the eminent holiness and virtue of his life; and by innumerable things which he foretold concerning himself, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish nation, and the success of his doctrine in the world, which were all afterwards punctually accomplished. All these proved him to be an extraordinary person. But he was likewise declared to be "the Son of God," by a voice from heaven, and by his resurrection from the dead.

Or if we consider the first publishers of this doctrine, to whom "God bare witness, with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost," and the wonderful success they met withal, notwithstanding the outward meanness of their persons, insomuch that their doctrine very suddenly prevailed, and passed like lightning through the world; and in the space of a few years, spread itself beyond the utmost bounds of the vast Roman empire, and this in despite of the most powerful opposition and fiercest persecutions that ever were raised against any religion: so that, like the children of Israel in Egypt, it did thrive under affliction, and the more it was oppressed, the more it grew and multiplied; because there was a Divine power that did visibly accompany the first publishers of it, and men "were not able to resist the Spirit whereby they spake."

All these together make up a full and convincing demonstration of the truth and divinity of the Christian doctrine: and yet perhaps no one of these alone is a sufficient proof of it. For though a doctrine be never so reasonable in itself, this is no certain argument that it is from God, if no testimony from heaven be given to it; because it may

be the result and issue of human reason and discourse: and though a doctrine attested by miracles, yet the matter of it may be so unreasonable and absurd, so unworthy of God, and so contrary to the natural notions which men have of him, that no miracles can be sufficient to give confirmation to it; and therefore in some cases the Scripture forbids men to hearken to a prophet, though he work a miracle. (Deut. xiii. 1—3.) "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods (which thou hast not known), and let us serve them: thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet." And the reason is given, (ver. 5.) "Because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God." From whence it is plain, that a miracle is not sufficient to establish the worship of a false god.

The sum of what I have said is this: that we do not found our belief of Christianity upon any one argument taken by itself; but upon the whole evidence which we are able to produce for it, in which there is nothing wanting that is proper and reasonable to prove any religion to be from God.

2. But yet miracles are the principal external proof and confirmation of the divinity of a doctrine. I told you before, that some doctrines are so absurd, that a miracle is not a sufficient proof of them: but if a doctrine be such as is no ways unworthy of God, nor contrary to those notions which we have of him, miracles are the highest testimony that can be given to it, and have always been owned by mankind for an evidence of inspiration. And therefore Nicodemus takes it for an acknowledged prin-

ciple, that miracles are " a sign of a teacher sent from God." (John iii. 2.) " We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for none can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him." And the Scripture constantly resolves the divinity of any person or doctrine into miracles as the chief external evidence that they are from God. This was the testimony which God gave to Moses, to satisfy the people of Israel that he had sent him. (Exod. iv. 1.) " And Moses answered, and said, But behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee." Upon this God tells Moses, that he would give him a power of miracles, to be an evidence to them that " they may believe, that the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hath appeared unto thee." And all along in the Old Testament, when God sent his prophets to make any new revelation, or upon any extraordinary message, he always gave credit to them, by some sign or wonder. And when he sent his Son into the world, he bare witness to him, by more and greater miracles than Moses, or any of the prophets had wrought. And to this testimony both our Saviour himself and the apostles appeal, as the great evidence of the divinity of their doctrine. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to our Saviour, to be satisfied whether he were the Messias, he refers them to his miracles, (Matt. xi. 4, 5.) " Go and shew John again those things which you do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up." And, (John v. 36.) " But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish,

the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." And, (Acts ii. 22.) "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you (ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀποδεδειγμένον εἰς ὑμᾶς, a man demonstrated by God to you), by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which he did in the midst of you." And (Acts xiv. 3.) it is said, that when the apostles preached the gospel, "God gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands." From all which it is plain, that our religion appeals to miracles, as the great external confirmation of it.

3. Especially if miracles have all the circumstances of advantage given to them which they are capable of; if they be many and great, public and unquestionable, and universal and of long continuance. And such were the miracles wrought by Moses, and by our Saviour and his apostles, which, for their nature and quality, for the number and continuance of them, and for all other circumstances that may give credit to them, and argue them to be from God, are in no degree to be equalled by those which any other religion hath pretended to.

And in these circumstances, miracles alone in most cases are a sufficient proof of the divinity of a doctrine; for there is a great deal of difference in reason to be made between one or two strange and miraculous effects, and those not of the highest and most unquestionable rank of miracles neither, privately wrought, and before few witnesses; and a long-continued series of miracles of all kinds, and such as are universally acknowledged to be above the power of nature, and those publicly wrought in the face and view of the world, in every city and country, by a great many persons for many years,

yea, for many ages together. The former may be doubted of, but the latter carry so sensible a conviction with them, that it is not credible, that the Divine goodness should permit so great and overpowering a testimony to be given to a falsehood.

4. It cannot be denied, but that God doth sometimes permit miracles to be wrought for the countenancing of a false doctrine. This the heathens pretended to at their temples and oracles; and it is not incredible, that God should permit the devil to do several strange and extraordinary things; though it be certain that there was a great deal of cheat and imposture mingled with them. To be sure the Scripture owns the working of miracles by false prophets. Moses takes notice of it in his law, and provides against it as a case that might happen; and our Saviour expressly foretells it, (Matt. xxiv.) and so does St. Paul, (2 Thess. ii. 9.) that "the man of sin should come after the working of Satan, with power, and signs, and wonders of lies;" that is, should work miracles to countenance his false and impious doctrines. And the Scripture likewise tells us, for what reason God does sometimes permit this to be done. For the trial of the good: (Deut. xiii. 3.) "For the Lord your God proveth you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your hearts." And for the hardening of the wicked, by the just judgment of God: (2 Thess. ii. 10—12.) "Because they received not the love of truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them ἐνέργοιαν πλάνης (the efficacy of imposture,) that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

5. And lastly, God never permits miracles to be

wrought for the confirmation of a false doctrine, but he affords sufficient marks, whereby those who are free and impartial inquirers after truth, and sincere lovers of it, may distinguish truth from imposture. So our Saviour tells us, that the elect, that is, the true and sincere Christians, should not be deceived by the "signs and wonders of the false Christs and false prophets." And therefore he was not afraid of having the credit of his doctrine weakened by foretelling that false prophets should work miracles; because he knew when the devil had done his utmost, the difference would be apparent enough between the confirmation which he had given to the Christian doctrine, and what the devil should be able to give to his instruments. As,

1. Either the doctrine would be absurd in itself, and such as no miracles can confirm. As in the case which Moses instanceth in, of a miracle wrought to seduce them from the worship of the one true God, who is naturally known, to the worship of idols. Or else,

2. It would be contrary to that doctrine which had already had a far greater and more Divine confirmation. And this, likewise, is another reason intimated by Moses, why the people should not hearken to a prophet that would seduce them to idolatry, though he should work a miracle; "because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt;" that is, from that God who hath demonstrated himself to them by such a series of great and unquestionable miracles as ought in all reason to bear down any single sign and wonder.

And the case is the same, if miracles should now be pretended for the confirmation of any thing

plainly contrary to the Christian doctrine, which, being established by such miracles as never were wrought in the world upon any other occasion, it cannot be thought reasonable, that any evidence inferior to this should be able to control it, or to give credit to any thing that contradicted it. And in this case the apostle has expressly forbidden Christians to hearken to a contrary doctrine, "though they themselves, or an angel from heaven, should preach it." (Gal. i. 8.) Therefore St. Paul expressly lays down this rule, whereby we may judge what miraculous powers are from the Spirit of God, and what not. (1 Cor. xii. 1.) "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant," that is, what miraculous gifts are from the Spirit of God, and what not; and then (ver. 3.) he gives this rule: "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man, speaking by the Spirit of God, calleth Jesus accursed; and that no man can say, that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost;" that is, if any man pretend to be inspired, and to be endowed with a miraculous power, and yet blasphemeth Christ, this spirit is not from God; but if any man be endowed with this power, and acknowledge Christ, we may safely conclude this power to be from the Holy Ghost. The very same rule St. John lays down yet more plainly: (1 John iv. 1—3.) "Believe not every spirit," that is, not every one that pretends to the gifts and inspirations of the Spirit; "but try the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God, and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh,

is not of God." And, (ver. 6.) "We are of God; he that knoweth God, heareth us: he that is not of God, heareth not us: hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." This seems at first sight to be a very odd rule, and what every false teacher, and every sect may lay down in favour of themselves, "he that knoweth God, heareth us: he that knoweth not God, heareth not us;" and nothing can make it reasonable, but the consideration that the Christian religion being already so abundantly confirmed beyond contradiction, is itself become a rule to try spirits or miracles by. Or,

3. The miracles which false prophets work are presently confuted, and upon the spot. Thus Moses confuted and conquered Pharaoh's magicians, by working miracles which they could not work, which forced them to yield the cause, and acknowledge that it was "the finger of God." And so likewise Simon Magus, who had gained so great a reputation among the people by his sorceries, as to be called "the mighty power of God," was confuted by the apostles, who, by the laying on of hands, conferred a miraculous power on men, which he not being able to do, would have purchased it with money. And so Elymas the sorcerer was struck blind by St. Paul. And the miracles of the heathen temples and oracles, upon the preaching of the gospel, ceased, as being ashamed of themselves; as Porphyry, one of the bitterest enemies of Christianity, does expressly acknowledge. Or else,

Lastly, The miracles wrought, or pretended to be wrought, to confirm false doctrines, are such as do, some way or other, confute themselves; or if they be real, are sufficiently detected to be the

pranks of the devil, and not the great and glorious works of God. Such were the miracles of the heathen deities, wrought so privately and obscurely, and confessedly mixed with so much of imposture, as to bring a just suspicion upon them, that, when they were real, the devil was the author of them. And such were the miracles which are attributed to Mahomet; either grossly absurd and ridiculous, as that of part of the moon coming down into his sleeve, and his remanding it to its place again; or else destitute of all proof and witness, as that of a camel's speaking to him by night; and his pigeon whispering to him in the ear; which, if it had been intended for a miracle, the pigeon should not have whispered, but have spoken out, that others might have heard it. But Mahomet was so conscious to himself of his own defect in point of miracles, that he laid no weight upon them, being, as he said, "not sent to convert the world by miracles, but to conquer them by force of arms."

And now I am sorry I have occasion to say it, but it is too true, that the miracles pretended to by the church of Rome, for the confirmation of their erroneous doctrines, are of the same stamp with these, taxed by several of their best writers of imposture and forgery, of fable and romance, so extravagant, and freakish, and fantastical, wrought without any necessity, and serving to no wise end, that they are so far from giving credit to their doctrines, that they are a mighty scandal to them, and to our common Christianity: whereas the truly Divine miracles, reported to us in Scripture, how unlike are they to these? How venerable in themselves, and in all the circumstances with which they are related? never wrought but upon great neces-

sity, and for excellent ends, full of benefit and advantage, of mercy and compassion to mankind; and, in a word, such as are every way worthy of their author, having plain characters of the Divine wisdom and goodness stamped upon them.

And thus I have done with the first thing I propounded to speak to, namely, that miracles are a Divine testimony; and in what circumstances, and with what cautions and limitations they are so. I shall at present only draw some inferences from what hath been discoursed upon this argument.

1. What hath been said may satisfy us of the truth and divinity of the Christian doctrine, which had so eminent a testimony given to it from heaven, and did at first so strangely prevail in the world, contrary to all human probability, "not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord." No man can suppose a religion in circumstances of greater disadvantage, and upon all human accounts more unlikely to sustain and bear up itself, than Christianity was. The first appearance of it was so weak, its beginnings so small, and the instruments employed in the propagation of it so mean and despicable, that no man but would have concluded it must have presently sunk and come to nought; and no other reason can be given of the strange success and prevalency of it, but that "it was of God," and therefore "it could not be overthrown."

2. From hence we may judge how groundless the pretences are, which men now-a-days make to inspiration and infallibility; because this is not to be proved and made out any other way but by miracles. For either we must believe every pretence of this kind; and then we are at the mercy of every

crafty and confident man, to be led by him into what delusions he pleases; or we must only believe those who give some testimony of their inspiration: but the evidence of inspiration was always miracles. This is the testimony which God hath always given to those whom he hath sent upon an extraordinary message to mankind. And this is that which we reasonably demand of our modern enthusiasts, and of the great pretender to infallibility, the bishop of Rome; because nothing can be more vain, than for men to pretend to inspiration, and an infallible spirit, without miracles. And yet I cannot learn that the popes themselves, among all their boundless privileges and powers, do so much as pretend to a power of miracles, which yet is the only thing that can in reason support their pretences to infallibility.

3. You see what an immediate testimony from heaven, God was pleased to give to the first preachers of the Christian doctrine, to qualify them with any probability of success, to contest with violent and almost invincible prejudices of men educated in a contrary religion, and which had the secular authority and laws on its side. For having this Divine seal given to their commission, they did as it were carry the letters-patents of heaven in their hands, and an authority paramount to that of human laws. And therefore the wisdom of God, which does nothing which is superfluous and unnecessary, did not think the apostles sufficiently armed and appointed for this design, by a commission from the mouth of the Son of God, without this Divine seal and testimony of miracles, as a visible evidence of their Divine commission. And, therefore, our Saviour, after he had commissioned them to preach

the gospel to all nations, commanded them not to enter upon this work, nor "to depart from Jerusalem, till they had received the promise of the Father;" that is, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, (Acts i. 4.) And so our Saviour explains it, (Luke xxiv. 47.) where, after he had commanded, "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem," he adds, (ver. 49.) "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." And to the same purpose, (Acts i. 8.) "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you;" by which he tells us, they were qualified to be "witnesses unto him, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

4. And lastly, The consideration of what has been said, doth justly upbraid us, that our religion, which hath such evident marks of divinity upon it, and comes down to us confirmed by so many miracles, should yet have so little efficacy upon the lives of the greatest part of those who call themselves Christians. It is true, miracles are now ceased among Christians, our religion being sufficiently established by those that were wrought at first; and now the greatest miracle in these latter ages, is a good man, a true and sincere Christian: but the laws of Christianity are still the same: and the motives and arguments to a good life, are still the same; and though the miraculous gifts of the Spirit have left the world, yet the sealing and sanctifying gifts of the Holy Ghost do still remain. We cannot now speak all languages, as the apostles did: but we may do that

which is much better, and more pleasing to God; we may live holy and virtuous lives. We have not that faith which works by miracles: but we may have that which is far more excellent, the faith which works by charity: which, if we believe St. Paul, is more than to speak with the tongues of men and angels, more than to prophesy, and to understand all mysteries and all knowledge.

The admirable piety and virtue of the first Christians are still upon record for our imitation: but I know not how it comes to pass, we choose rather lazily to admire those patterns, than vigorously to imitate them; as if the holiness of those times were also miraculous, and not intended for the imitation of succeeding ages; as if it were impossible for us now to lead such lives as they did; as if heaven and earth, God and men, and all things, were altered since that time; as if the Christian religion was now quite dispirited, and had lost all its vigour and force; and as if the Holy Spirit of God had to all intents and purposes forsaken the world, and were retired to the Father.

But our religion is still the same it was: the precepts of it as reasonable, and the promises of it as powerful as ever: God is still the same he was; and Christ still at the right hand of God, making intercession for us; and the Holy Spirit of God still ready to assist us, to every good word and work.

To conclude: we have, beyond comparison, the best and most reasonable religion in the world; a religion which carries along with it the greatest evidence of its truth, which contains the best rules and directions for a good life, which offers the most powerful assistance to the obedience of its laws, and gives the greatest encouragements thereto, by

the assurance of a blessed immortality in another world. Now the better our religion is, our case is so much the worse, if we be not made good by it. Philosophy had some effect upon the world to make some men temperate and chaste, just and honest in their lives. And the Jewish religion (as weak and imperfect as it was, and though it was but "the shadow of good things to come") hath yet left us many eminent examples of good and holy men. What then shall become of us, if the best institution in the world, the blessed gospel of the Son of God, have less effect upon us than the doctrine of Pythagoras, and the law of Moses had upon them? "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him! God also bearing them witness with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.—To which blessed and glorious Trinity, be all honour and glory, now and for ever."

SERMON CCXXIX.

OF THE MIRACLES WROUGHT IN CONFIRMATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.—HEB. ii. 4.

I HAVE begun to discourse upon these words, from which I told you three things offer themselves to our consideration.

First, That miracles are a Divine testimony to a person or doctrine. God is here said to "bear witness to the apostles, by signs, and wonders, and miracles."

Secondly, That God gave this testimony to the apostles and first publishers of the gospel, in a very eminent manner; for so the phrase signifies, "God bearing them witness, with signs, and wonders, and miracles;" so many words to the same sense being purposely used to signify the greatness of the thing.

Thirdly, The reasons why miracles are now ceased in the church, and have been for several ages; so that there have been no footsteps of this miraculous power for several ages past. The first I have spoken to, and proceed now to the

Second thing which I proposed to consider, viz. That God gave testimony to the apostles and first publishers of Christianity, in a very eminent manner; for so the expression in the text signifies,

where so many words are used for the same thing, to express, according to the manner of the Hebrew phrase, the greatness of the thing; "God bearing them witness, both with signs, and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost," that is, with many and great miracles, καὶ μερισμοῖς, "and distributions of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will;" that is, God distributed these several miraculous powers and gifts among the apostles and first preachers of the gospel; not all to every one of them, but some to one, and some to another, as to him seemed best, and was most for the benefit and edification of the church.

The history of it, in short, is this. When our blessed Saviour ascended into heaven, he promised to send down his Spirit in miraculous gifts upon his apostles, to give credit to his doctrine, and to qualify them for the more speedy planting and propagating of it in the world; and accordingly, not many days after he was ascended into heaven, as an evidence of the power and glory he was invested withal, he, according to his promise immediately before his ascension, sent down the Holy Ghost upon the apostles in a visible manner, that is, in the form of fiery cloven tongues, as an emblem of one of the principal gifts they were endowed withal, viz. the knowledge and ability of speaking several languages, which they had never learned. And this happened upon the day of Pentecost, that so the gospel might exactly correspond to the dispensation of the law, which was the type and figure of it. And, therefore, as our Saviour died at the time of the Jewish passover, which was the type of his sufferings; so the gospel, which was the perfection and fulfilling of the law, began to be published at the very same

time that the law was given from Mount Sinai, viz. at the end of the seven weeks after the passover. For, at this time the Holy Ghost descended upon the apostles in miraculous powers and gifts; when this new law was "to come forth out of Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

And among these gifts, the first we find mentioned was the gift of tongues; without which the gospel must of necessity have been very slowly propagated in the world: for had the apostles been first to learn the several languages of the nations they were to preach to, how tedious a work would that have been! it requiring the industry of some years, to gain so perfect a mastery of a strange language, as to be able to use it with that freedom and readiness which are necessary for such a work.

And this gift all the apostles had, because they all had occasion for it, being designed by our Saviour to be the chief publishers of his gospel to the world. And this gift did also continually reside upon them, and not only at some times, as some other gifts did, because they had constant use of this gift of tongues.

The interpreting of things spoken in a strange tongue, was also a gift distinct from the gift of tongues, though attending it; insomuch that some persons had one, and some the other. So the apostle tells us, (1 Cor. xii. 10.) "To one is given divers kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues." The occasion of which was plainly this; it might happen, and often did, that the auditory might consist of people of several nations; now because no man could speak more than one language at once, it was convenient others should have the gift of interpreting what was spoken, to those who

understood not the language in which it was spoken, that so all might receive the benefit of what was delivered, and be edified thereby. So that here were two several gifts serving the same end, viz. the conveying of the knowledge of the gospel to mankind, in a more speedy way than it could have been done by ordinary means; and these were very plain and sensible miracles, unquestionably supernatural, and evident to the senses of all men. So that the gospel, wherever it was preached, carried its own testimony along with it, and was confirmed by the very manner of its conveyance and delivery: and well might men entertain it as a Divine doctrine, when the very manner, and the means whereby it was published, was a miracle.

And here I cannot but take notice, how contrary the arts and the ways of the church of Rome are to the methods of God, and that when he was at the expense of so many miracles to publish this doctrine to the world, they should use so much industry and violence to conceal it. God was pleased to endow the first preachers of it with the gift of tongues, that "their sound might go into all the earth, and their word to the end of the world," that there might be no nation nor language where this saving knowledge might not come, that the sermons which they preached, and the prayers which they put up to God in public, for themselves and the people, and all the offices of religion which they performed, might be fully understood by all, and that all might join in them, and have the benefit and comfort of them; that their uuderstandings might be informed and enlightened by what was spoken, and their affections raised and warmed by their understandings, and their wills excited by their affections,

and that the effect of all this might appear in their lives and practice. Thus it was in the primitive Christian church; but in the church of Rome, things are managed in a quite contrary way, and have been for several ages. The doctrine of salvation, as it is contained and delivered in the Holy Scripture, is "a sealed book," which the people are not thought "worthy to open or look into." This "bread of life which came down from heaven," is like the show-bread among the Jews, "which none may eat but the priest only," unless it be by extraordinary favour, and particular licence from the bishop. The people indeed come together, and are present at the prayers and devotion of the priest; but the priest "that prays is a barbarian to them," and all the while the understanding of the people is unfruitful, and "they cannot say Amen, because they understand not what he says."

But let any man shew me the least intimation in Scripture or antiquity, that our Saviour or his apostles, or the primitive church, ever used this way; and yet the danger of error and heresy was as great then as it is now. So that the church of Rome must pretend themselves wiser than our Saviour and his apostles; and to be more careful to prevent heresy in the church, than they were. This they are loath to say; and yet they must say it, if they will justify their own doings. But the plain truth is, there is another and truer reason for it, though they are not willing to own it, and that is this; if the Scriptures were permitted to the people in a language which they understood, the errors of their church would be discovered and laid open, and men would plainly discern how contrary many of their doctrines and practices are, to those of our

Saviour and his apostles: for "every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered."

Secondly, The next miraculous gift I shall mention after the gift of tongues, is the gift of prophecy, or foretelling things future, which was always looked upon as an evidence of inspiration. And this we find mentioned 1 Cor. xii. 10. "To another prophecy," and in several other places; and to this gift the apostle gives a great pre-eminence. (1 Cor. xiv. 1.) "Covet spiritual gifts: but rather that ye may prophesy;" because foretelling of things to come, was always esteemed by mankind an evidence of a person divinely inspired, and consequently was one of the greatest testimonies of the truth of Christianity; and this the angel that appeared to St. John particularly takes notice of, (Rev. xix. 10.) "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The prophecies of that book were to be a standing testimony of the truth of Christianity in all ages of the church.

Thirdly, The next gift is that of healing all manner of diseases. And this the apostles seem generally to have had, and the elders of the church also, whose peculiar office it was to pray over the sick, and to anoint them with oil; and upon their prayers, God was pleased to grant miraculous recoveries, as we find expressly promised, (James v. 14, 15.) "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up."

This miraculous power we find likewise mentioned to be conferred on the apostles in our Sa-

viour's life-time, when he first gave them commission to preach the gospel to the Jews; (Mark vi. 12, 13.) where it is said, that "they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them."

And now that this miraculous gift is ceased, there is no reason why the mere ceremony of anointing with oil should continue; which yet is still used in the church of Rome, and made a sacrament; though it signify nothing: for they do not pretend to heal men by it; nay, they pretend the contrary, because they never use it, but in extremity, and where they look upon the person as past recovery; and if they did not think so, they would not use it.

But besides the healing, with this solemnity of anointing with oil, and with prayer, which seems to have been used by the elders of the church only upon those who were members of the church, there was likewise a general gift of healing, which the apostles exercised upon all occasions wherever they came; and this was performed only by laying their hands on the sick. And this we find promised by our Saviour to his apostles when he gave them commission to preach the gospel to all the world, immediately before his ascension; and not only to the apostles, but to those who should believe upon their preaching: (Mark xvi. 17, 18.) "These signs shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out devils," &c. And then it follows, "they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

Fourthly, The power of raising the dead, which hath always been esteemed one of the greatest and most unquestionable miracles of all other. A prin-

cipal part of the apostles' office was to "be witnesses of our Saviour's resurrection from the dead," whereby he was so "powerfully demonstrated to be the Son of God." But because this was a strange relation, and not easy to be credited, by those who were strangers to the apostles, and had never known them before; therefore, that they might witness this with more authority, God was pleased to endow them with a miraculous power of all kinds; and particularly with a power of raising the dead; and then there was no difficulty in receiving their testimony concerning our Saviour's resurrection, when men saw them in his name raise others from the dead. And of this we have two instances in the Acts of the Apostles; of St. Peter's raising Dorcas, (Acts ix.) and St. Paul's raising Eutychus, (Acts xx.) And Irenæus, who lived in the age after the apostles, tells us, that in his time this power continued among Christians.

Fifthly, Another miraculous gift was that of discerning spirits; the principal use of which was, to try and judge who were true prophets. And of this the apostle speaks: (1 Cor. xiv. 29.) "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge." And, (ver. 32.) "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." And this is likewise called by the same apostle, "the gift of discerning spirits," (1 Cor. xii. 10.) "To another is given the discerning of spirits." Those who pretended to this gift, were tried by the bishops and elders of the church, as the prophets were tried among the Jews by the Sanhedrin. And of these kinds of assemblies among the Christians, for the trial of prophets, Eusebius speaks particularly in his fifth book.

And it should seem, likewise, that this gift of discerning spirits, extended also to the discovery of the secrets of men's hearts; by the revealing whereof, unbelievers were many times struck and convinced; as may very probably be collected from 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. "But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned; he is convinced of all, he is judged of all. And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth."

And upon this miraculous gift of knowing the secrets of men's hearts, it seems to be very probable, that that which is commonly called the power of the keys did depend; I mean the power of remitting or retaining sins: for they who had the privilege of knowing men's hearts, might do this upon certain grounds, and were secured from mistake in the exercise of their power upon particular persons; which the priests and ministers of the church now are not, nor can be; because they cannot see into men's hearts, whether they be truly penitent and qualified for forgiveness or not. For I cannot easily believe but that those words of our Saviour, "Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whose sins ye retain, they are retained;" were intended to signify something more than a mere declaration of the promises and threatenings of the gospel, which any man might make as well as the apostles and ministers of the church. For that God will forgive the penitent, and that he will not pardon the sinner, except he repent, is as true from any man's mouth, as from an apostle's: and as to the absolution of this or that particular person, though a minister by the skill and knowledge of his profession, is ordinarily

and reasonably presumed, by virtue of his office, to be a better judge of a man's repentance, than other persons are, and therefore may, with more authority and satisfaction to the penitent, declare his judgment and opinion concerning him; yet, not being able to see into his heart, he may be mistaken concerning him: and if he be, his declaring his sins to be forgiven, that is, his absolution of him, will do him no good: and, on the other hand, his refusal to absolve him, if he be truly penitent, will do him no harm. As the judgment of a skilful lawyer is of greater authority, and more satisfactory to us, concerning our title to an estate, than the opinion of another man who is not of the profession, nor presumed to have the like skill; but yet for all this, his judgment does not alter the case, and if in truth the law be otherwise, our title is bad for all this skilful man's opinion of the goodness of it.

And thus much is granted by the church of Rome, that if the priest be mistaken in the use of the keys, and gives absolution to one that is not truly penitent, his sins are not remitted; or if a person be excommunicated that is not truly guilty, his sins are not retained; what "he binds on earth, is" not "bound in heaven; and he whom he looseth and absolves on earth, is" not "absolved in heaven." But the protestants go farther, and do not only make a mistaken absolution or excommunication void in itself; but they do not make the absolution of the priest at all necessary to the forgiveness of sins, but only convenient for the satisfaction and comfort of the penitent. For which reason, our church does not require a formal absolution to be given to the dying penitent, unless he himself desire it; which is a certain argument, that, in the judgment of our

church, the absolution of the priest is not necessary to the forgiveness and salvation of the penitent. For had they thought it necessary, they would have enjoined the priest to give it to every one whom he judged penitent, whether he desired it or not.

So that the absolution of the priest, having only the authority of a man, presumed to be skilful in the office, but no certain effect, in case he be mistaken (as he very easily may be, and if he be, as he ought to be, a charitable man, no doubt often is) I cannot think but that this power of remitting and retaining sins, so solemnly conferred on the apostles by our Saviour, had something in it that was miraculous, and extraordinary, and did suppose the knowledge of men's hearts, and that they were not mistaken in the application of this power to particular persons; and consequently, that in that miraculous and extraordinary degree, it was peculiar to the apostles and their times. For I cannot easily be brought to believe, that the meaning of this great promise to the apostles should be only this, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth (if ye be not mistaken, as in many cases ye will be, and in any case ye may be) shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." And if more be meant than this, it must suppose a miraculous power of discerning the sincerity of men's hearts.

And, therefore, when the power of the keys is conferred on the ministers of the gospel, in our form of ordination, I suppose that only one or both of these two things is intended by it, viz. a power to admit persons into the Christian church by baptism, in which is sealed to them the remission of sins;

and to cast persons out of the communion of the Christian church, by excommunication and the censures of it; and an authority, by virtue of their office, to declare to men the terms of pardon and forgiveness, which cannot be that infallible power of absolving which the apostles had.

And I am the rather induced to think so, because I find it promised to the apostles, together with the miraculous power and efficacy of prayer, which St. Chrysostom reckons among the miraculous gifts, which he says were ceased in his time. That it was thus promised, you may see Matt. xviii. 18, 19. "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven. Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." But surely, no man will pretend that any two Christians or ministers have now this power, that whatever they shall agree together to ask of God, which is fit and lawful in behalf of any person, God will certainly grant it upon their request. In the same sense I understand several other texts concerning the efficacy of the prayers of the apostles and first Christians, as in a great measure miraculous, and peculiar to the first times of Christianity. And, I think, any man that attentively considers them, will think that they cannot well be understood otherwise. Such as these: (Matt. xxi. 22.) "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (Mark xi. 24.) "I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." (John xiv. 14.) "If

ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it:" and (chap. xv. 7.) "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (1 John iii. 22.) "And whatsoever we ask we receive of him;" and, (chap. v. 14, 15.) "And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask any thing, according to his will, he heareth us. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." These promises I take to contain something extraordinary, and peculiar to the first times of Christianity. And this will appear exceeding probable, if we consider the occasion and circumstances of these promises which are so often joined with the promise of a miraculous power, as in the place I mentioned before, (Matt. xviii. 18, 19.) where, after the power of binding and loosing, it immediately follows, that "if two of you shall agree on earth, touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." Matt. xxi. 22. and Mark xi. 23. says our Saviour there to his disciples; "Have faith in God; for verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith." And then immediately it follows: "Therefore, I say unto you, Whatsoever things you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and ye shall have them;" that is, Whatever ye desire of God to do, he shall miraculously do it, upon your prayers. So likewise, (John xiv. 12—14.) "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works

than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." Still you see this extraordinary efficacy of prayer is joined with the power of miracles, as one part and branch of it. More particularly, we find the forgiveness of the sins of those whom they prayed for, expressly promised: (1 John v. 15.) "And if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we desired of him." And then it follows: "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for the sin that is not unto death." Where forgiveness of sins, upon the prayers of Christians for one another, is promised, except in the case of "a sin unto death," by which is meant apostacy from Christianity to the heathen idolatry, which is the reason of the caution which follows: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." And this extraordinary efficacy of prayer, we find promised in a more special manner to the elders of the church: (James v. 14, 15.) "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up: and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."

In comparing of all these texts, it seems plain, that both the power of remitting and retaining sins, and the strange efficacy of prayer, which were promised to the apostles and first Christians, had something miraculous and extraordinary in them, and were peculiar to the first ages of the church. I will not

be peremptory in these things; but this seems to be the most genuine and reasonable interpretation of these texts.

Sixthly, And, besides these which I have mentioned, there was likewise a power of inflicting corporal punishments and diseases upon scandalous and obstinate Christians; which in Scripture is called, "a delivering men up to Satan, for the destroying or tormenting of their bodies, that their souls might be saved at last." And of this kind were those diseases which befel the Christians, for their disorderly and irregular carriage at the sacrament, of which the apostle speaks; (1 Cor. xi. 30.) "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep:" that is, to some of them these distempers proved mortal. And we find that this power did in some cases extend to the inflicting of sudden and present death, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. And, indeed, considering that Christianity was at first destitute of any countenance from the civil power, some such power as this was necessary to maintain the authority of the apostles against the contumacious and disobedient.

And then, lastly, there was the power of casting out devils in the name of Christ, which was common to the meanest Christian, and continued in the church a long time after most of the other gifts were ceased, as Tertullian, Minucius Felix, and Arnobius, do most expressly testify concerning their times.

Thus you see that there were almost all imaginable kinds of miraculous powers conferred upon the apostles and first Christians, to give the greater establishment and confirmation to the Christian doctrine.

All the reflection I shall make upon what has

been said, shall be this; since our religion comes down to us confirmed by such miraculous powers, we ought to take the more earnest heed to it, to believe it more steadfastly, and to practise it more carefully in our lives. "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

SERMON CCXXX.

OF THE MIRACLES WROUGHT IN CONFIRMATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.—HEB. ii. 4.

IN these words, three things offer themselves to our consideration.

First, That miracles are a Divine testimony given to a person or doctrine.

Secondly, That God gave this testimony to the apostles and first publishers of the gospel in a very eminent manner. Of these two I have discoursed at large, and now proceed to the

Third and last thing which I proposed, viz. the reason why these miracles are now ceased in the Christian church, and have been for a long time, so that there have been no footsteps of this miraculous power for many ages. And in the handling of this argument, I shall do these three things:

I. Shew that these miraculous gifts and powers have ceased in the Christian church for several ages.

II. I shall assign a plain reason of the ceasing of miracles after such a time.

III. Answer the objection from the innumerable miracles which have been and are still pretended to be wrought in the church of Rome.

I. I shall shew, that these miraculous powers and gifts have ceased in the church for several ages.

That they are now ceased we find by certain experience; nor are they pretended to at this day by any part of the Christian church, except the church of Rome, where yet they are nothing so plentiful now-a-days, as they were in those ignorant ages, from the time of the degeneracy and corruption of the western church down to the Reformation; and now chiefly pretended to in those parts of the Roman communion, where their religion reigns without any contradiction, and the people are under the awe and lash of the Inquisition, so that they dare neither gainsay, nor offer to detect the forgery and imposture of them; and yet here is less need of them, because the people are all of a mind, and believe as the church would have them, and dare not for their lives do otherwise. For where the Inquisition rules, and ignorance, the mother, not of true devotion, but of credulity and superstition, is carefully preserved, there is no need of miracles to make people believe what they have a mind to: but in other places, where their religion is opposed, and there is great occasion for them, both to confirm those of their own religion, and to reduce heretics and unbelievers, there is little or no pretence to them, as I shall shew by and by.

So that all over the Christian church, except in the church of Rome, all pretence to these miraculous powers and gifts is now ceased, and hath been for many ages. St. Chrysostom, speaking of his time, which was about four hundred years after Christ, says that these miraculous powers were then ceased, and speaks as if no footsteps of them were left in the pastors and governors of the church, much less among private Christians; for which he gives us this substantial reason (which I shall speak to after-

wards) that Christianity being now already established by miracles, there was no reason to expect the continuance of them. St. Augustine indeed, sometime after, speaks of many miraculous things done at sepulchres of the martyrs. But this doth not contradict what St. Chrysostom had said, because he speaks of the living teachers and members of the church, in whom those miraculous gifts and powers were ceased: but that the same miraculous cures were wrought upon the prayers of Christians, at the tombs of the martyrs, is a confirmation of the thing, that God designed to honour the primitive Christians and martyrs with these gifts, and not to continue them to the succeeding ages of the church; and therefore God was pleased that so many wonderful things should be done at their sepulchres, to shew that he did intend, that these miraculous powers and gifts should die with them, and continue no longer in the living members of the church.

II. I shall now assign a plain reason of the ceasing of these miraculous gifts after such a time; namely, because there was not the like necessity and occasion for them, that there was before. They were at first in a great degree necessary to introduce the gospel into the world, which was destitute of all other helps and advantages, to recommend it to the esteem and liking of mankind; to give credit to a new doctrine and religion, so contrary to the inveterate prejudices of men, bred up in another religion very different from this, and so opposite to the lusts and interests of men; to make way for the more speedy and effectual planting of this religion in the world; to strengthen the hands of the first publishers of it, and to give credit to their testimony,

concerning that strange relation of theirs, of the resurrection of Christ from the dead; to be a sensible evidence and conviction to men, of the divinity of that new doctrine which was preached unto them, and to support and confirm them in the belief and profession of it, against those terrible sufferings and persecutions, which for the sake of it they were exposed to. For these reasons God was pleased to shed abroad so plentifully these miraculous gifts, among the first preachers of Christianity; and as these reasons ceased or abated, so did these miraculous powers and gifts; and therefore, as soon as the gospel was planted, which it was in a great part of the then known world, during the lives of the apostles, the gift of tongues ceased, and we hear no more of it, because there was no farther use and occasion for it. Other gifts did continue longer, but abated by degrees, according as Christianity gained ground and establishment, and they grew less frequent, as there was less need of them. The power of casting out devils, which was most common (for every Christian had it) continued longest; and there was reason it should continue so long as the devil reigned, and the pagan idolatry was kept up, to shew that the Spirit of Christ was superior to the devil, and would finally overcome him, and overthrow his kingdom, according to that of St. John, (1 John iv. 4.) "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." And this appeared in that they were able in the name of Christ to cast him out, wherever he had taken possession, which God permitted to be very frequent in those times, for the more glorious manifestation of his power, "in casting out the prince of this world."

But when the powers of the world became Christian, and the heathen idolatry was every where overthrown, and Satan's kingdom every where destroyed, then this miraculous gift also ceased, there being no farther occasion for it. And now that "the kingdoms of the world were become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ," and that the gospel was planted, and had taken firm root and was fully settled and established, these miraculous powers, which were at first necessary to balance the mighty difficulties and oppositions which Christianity met withal, and to supply the want of all manner of countenance from the civil authority, were withdrawn and did cease, because there was no need of their longer continuance.

Besides that it is to be considered, that those miraculous powers which manifested themselves in the first ages of Christianity, were intended by God to give a standing confirmation to it in after ages; as the miracles that were wrought at the giving of the law, and the bringing of the children of Israel into Canaan, were designed for a standing confirmation of the Jewish religion, the memory whereof was so carefully preserved and transmitted to after ages, that they needed not to be repeated.

I come now in the

Third and last place to answer that objection from the innumerable miracles which have been, and still are pretended to be, wrought in the church of Rome. And so indeed we find that the Arians and other heretics in former times pretended to miracles, for the confirmation of their errors, a good while after miracles were generally ceased in the Christian church, which shews that this is no new or strange thing.

In answer to this objection, I desire these following particulars may be considered:

First, That the most learned and judicious writers of the Roman church do acknowledge that there is no necessity of miracles now, and that Christianity is sufficiently established by the miracles which were wrought at first to give testimony to it; and therefore, not being necessary, without manifest evidence of fact, it is not necessary to believe that they are continued.

Secondly, The miracles pretended to by the church of Rome are of very doubtful and suspected credit, even among the wisest persons of their own communion; and therefore, I hope they do not expect we should give much credit to those miracles, of the truth of which they themselves are in so much doubt, that they are generally looked upon by the more prudent and learned among them as pious frauds, to raise and entertain the devotion of the weak and ignorant. Several of them have been convicted of fraud and imposture, not only here in England, in times of popery, and at the beginning of the Reformation, but in other countries, where that religion bears sway.

And it is observable, that the greatest part of the history of these miracles (which they call legends) was written in the romance age, and much in the same style, with the like wantonness and extravagance of fancy, and fulsome absurdity of invention, and, it is to be feared, with the like regard to truth. And I know not whether romances had not their name, as well as their original, from these Roman legends, of which they are exact copies and imitations; and as these were sacred, so those were a sort of civil legends, in which they represented

their heroes doing the like absurd feats and miracles in chivalry, as their saints in their legends are said to do in religion; and they were both written by the lazy and unlearned monks, and by them dressed up and fitted to the gust of those ignorant and superstitious ages.

And yet these legends of "lying wonders" have not only been put into the hands of the people, but lessons out of them have been taken, as out of the Scriptures, and distributed into the public offices of their church, to be read there, as the Scriptures are, and instead of them; only with this difference—that the people are permitted to have the Scriptures only in an unknown tongue, but the legends, out of which these lessons are taken, they are permitted to have at home, in their own tongue; as if there was no danger of error or heresy from false stories, but only from the word of truth. And herein is remarkably fulfilled that prophecy concerning the followers of antichrist, (2 Thess. ii. 11.) that "because they received not the truth in the love of it, God would send them strong delusions, (ἐνέργειαν πλάνης, the efficacy of imposture,) that they should believe a lie." And how could they more solemnly declare the belief and love of lies, than by putting these ridiculous fables into the public offices of the church, in place of the Holy Scriptures; and at the same time that they deny to the people the use of the Scriptures in a known tongue, to permit them the use, and to recommend to them the reading, of these lying legends, out of which these ridiculous lessons are taken?

Thirdly, The miracles of the church of Rome, supposing several of them to be true, have such marks and characters upon them, as render it very

suspicious that they are not operations of God, or good spirits, but the working of Satan. If any man have but the patience to rake into these dunghills, and to read over these legends, even as they have by the latter collectors and compilers been purged and reformed, he shall find the miracles recited in them, to be generally of one stamp, very foolish and absurd, frivolous and trifling, wrought without any necessity, upon no good occasion, to no wise end and purpose; so that one may know them by their very countenances to be the tricks and pranks of the devil, and not the great and glorious works of God, such as are the miracles recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

Fourthly, The miracles of the church of Rome, taking them for true, are very impertinently and unseasonably wrought. When and where there is no need and occasion for them, they are very rife and frequent; but where there is greatest occasion for them, and most reason to expect them, they are either not at all, or very rarely so much as pretended to. In times and places where their religion did most absolutely bear sway, and few or none durst oppose it, and where the doctrines which they pretended to confirm by these miracles were most generally believed, as in those long, dark, and ignorant times before the Reformation, and now in Italy and Spain, where the Inquisition forceth them all to be of one belief, or to profess to be so; in these times and places, where there was least need and occasion for miracles, then and there did they most abound, even more, (if we may believe their histories) for several ages before the Reformation, than in the times of our Saviour and his apostles. But since the Reformation, and that many of their doc-

trines are called in question and disbelieved, miracles are grown rare, and almost ceased, even in popish countries; and they have had but very ill success with those few they have pretended to; witness the miracle at Angiers in France, of a child appearing over the altar at the time of mass, to convince all people of the doctrine of transubstantiation, with which the papists made such a noise here in England about fourteen or fifteen years ago, and which at last was discovered to be an artificial juggle and contrivance of some cunning priest, and published to the world for a cheat, by the honest and worthy bishop of that place.

But where there seems to be the most need of them, they are most wanting: as for the conversion of heathens, and the conviction of heretic infidels. For the conversion of heathens: in which case, if men did sincerely design the propagation of the true and uncorrupted Christianity, I do not see why miracles might not yet reasonably be expected; but yet for all this, we hear of very few miracles, not so much as the gift of tongues, even upon this occasion. In the first planting of the West Indies, we hear of no miracles, except the most prodigious cruelties that ever were in the world, to the infinite scandal of the Christian name. And in the East Indies, and China, Xaverius and the first missionaries speak with no assurance of any miracles wrought by them; and since that time, they have so depraved the Christian religion there, by concealing a most essential part of it, the death and sufferings of our Saviour, as if they were "ashamed of the cross of Christ," that it is not credible, that God should vouchsafe the countenance of miracles to those who "preach another gospel."

And then for the conviction of heretics (as they are pleased to call us protestants) one would think miracles (since they have that power) would be very proper for that purpose to be wrought among them; as now here in England, where they are continually endeavouring (but especially of late with more than usual vigour and hopes) to restore their religion, and yet for all this, we cannot prevail with them to favour us with the sight of one miracle, in order to our conviction; but if they have any, they keep them private among themselves, though both reason and Scripture tell us, that miracles were not intended for them that believe, but to convince them that believe not.

Fifthly, He from whom of all persons in that church we might expect the most and greatest miracles, does not, so far as I can learn, pretend at all to that gift; I mean the head of their church, the pope, who, both as he is vicar of Christ, and successor of St. Peter in his full power and office, or if he be not his successor, yet as he is his shadow, and pretends to be his successor, might fairly pretend to a power of miracles above any in that church; and I have often wondered why he does not: but it seems he contents himself with infallibility, which is privilege and power enough for one man; and indeed, if he had it, and could satisfy others that he hath it, that would serve his turn without miracles: but the mischief of it is, there is no other external evidence which can reasonably satisfy others of any man's inspiration or infallibility, but miracles; and therefore, the pope hath done very unadvisedly, in pretending to one without the other, when he hath the same right and title to both; that is, none at all.

Sixthly, Most of the doctrines in difference between us and the church of Rome, which they chiefly pretend to confirm by these miracles, are not capable of being confirmed by them. There are three sorts of doctrines, two of which are in their own nature incapable of being confirmed by a miracle, and a third upon supposition of its contrariety to the Christian doctrine, which hath already had an unquestionable Divine confirmation.

1. No doctrine which is contrary to sense, is capable of being confirmed by a miracle, as transubstantiation; which, because it necessarily requires the renouncing of our senses, in order to the belief of it, for that very reason miracles can give no credit to it. For that which depends on the certainty of sense, as miracles certainly do, can be no competent argument to prove that which is contrary to sense, as transubstantiation is.

2. No doctrine that does countenance or enjoin idolatry is capable of being confirmed by a miracle. This is evident from Deut. xiii. where Moses supposeth that a prophet might work a sign or a wonder; but if it was to seduce them from the worship of the true God, who is naturally known, to the worship of idols, in that case they were not to hearken to him, notwithstanding he wrought a miracle; but the church of Rome teacheth idolatry in their worship of images, and of the host, and in the invocation of saints and angels.

3. No doctrine contrary to any part of the Christian doctrine, which hath already received an unquestionable Divine confirmation, is capable of being confirmed by the miracles pretended to in the church of Rome, if they were real. For I hope they have not the face to pretend their miracles to

be equal to those of our Saviour and his apostles, either for the certainty or greatness of them; and I have already shewn, that they notoriously want both the credit and certainty of our Saviour's miracles, and the marks of their divinity.

Now several of the doctrines of that church are directly contrary to, or inconsistent with, the doctrines of Christianity. Their endeavour to conceal from people the doctrine of the gospel, contained in the Holy Scriptures, is a notorious contradiction to the design of the gospel, and to that particular miracle whereby the knowledge of it was conveyed to the world, the gift of tongues; and then the service of God in an unknown tongue, which is inconsistent with true devotion, contrary to edification, and to the plain scope and design of a whole chapter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. And so likewise is the communion in one kind, to our Saviour's express institution; and the repetition of Christ's sacrifice, to as express a declaration of the apostle to the Hebrews to the contrary, as it is possible for words to make.

Seventhly and lastly, which falls heaviest upon them of all, the chief prophecies of the New Testament, which are concerning false prophets, and concerning antichrist, have marked him out by this character, that he should be a great worker of miracles, and magnify himself upon this pretence. (Matt. xxiv. 24.) "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch that (if it were possible) they shall deceive the very elect." And (2 Thess. ii. 9, 10.) St. Paul foretells there, that in the great degeneracy and falling away of the Christian church, "the man of sin shall come after the working of Satan, with all power,

and signs, and wonders of lies," that is, either false miracles, or miracles wrought to confirm false doctrines, "and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness," all the legerdemain and juggling tricks of falsehood and imposture; and certainly nothing was ever more visible than these are in the church of Rome; whether we consider their impudent forgeries of writings (which they have not the face now to deny), or the nature and character of their miracles. So that though Bellarmine is pleased to make miracles one of the marks of the true church, yet the miracles of the church of Rome, if we consider all the circumstances of them, are one of the plainest marks of antichrist, and the very brand of the beast, as we find him described, (Rev. xiii. 13, 14.) "And he doth great wonders, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth, by means of those miracles which he had power to do."

And now the church of Rome may be allowed to work miracles; and yet Divine miracles, such as were wrought for the first confirmation of Christianity, may be ceased in the church; which is a sufficient answer to the objection, and upon the whole matter shews, that the miracles pretended to in the church of Rome, are so far from giving any confirmation to her doctrines, that they are rather an evident proof that she is the apostate and antichristian church.

I might now draw two or three inferences from this whole discourse. As,

I. We have great reason to admire the wisdom and goodness of God in the dispensation of the gospel, that, by the sending down of his Holy Spirit to endow the first publishers of this heavenly doctrine with such miraculous gifts and powers, he hath given such

abundant testimony to the truth of our religion, and such firm grounds for our faith to rely upon.

II. The consideration of what hath been said convinceth men of the great sin of infidelity, and the unreasonableness of it, after so clear conviction and demonstration as God hath given to the world of the truth of Christianity.

III. And lastly, They who believe the gospel, are utterly inexcusable, if they do not obey it, and live according to it. For this is the great end of all the miracles which God hath wrought for the confirmation of Christianity, that by the belief of the gospel men might be brought to "the obedience of faith," and live conformably to the precepts of that holy religion, which the Son of God by so many miracles hath planted and preserved in the world. But these I have* discoursed of on another occasion, and therefore shall insist upon them no farther at this time.

* See Sermon CXCVII. vol. viii. p. 397.

SERMON CCXXXI.

THE ADVANTAGES OF TRUTH, IN OPPOSITION TO ERROR.

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.—1 JOHN iv. 4, 5.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the apostle cautions Christians against the false teachers, and false prophets, intending more especially those of the gnostic sect, as is plain from the scope of the whole Epistle, who were so busy to seduce Christians to their impious ways, and to tempt them to apostatize from the Christian religion to the heathen idolatry, for fear of persecution.

And to encourage them who had hitherto continued in the truth, and resisted the seducing arts of those false prophets, still to persevere in their holy profession and practice, he tells them what advantages they, who have embraced the truth and lived according to it, have above those who seduce men to errors, or are seduced by them. "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." That which gives truth and the professors of it the advantage over error and seducers, is, that truth is from God, and the Spirit of God dwells in those who sincerely embrace and obey it.

"Ye are of God," that is, ye are taught by him, and instructed in the doctrine which is from God, and relish Divine truth, which our Saviour calls savouring the things which are of God, in opposition to the things of the world, the lusts and interests of the world which sway and rule in those false prophets and seducing spirits. For so it follows in the next verse, "they are of the world;" they are acted by worldly lusts and interests: "therefore speak they of the world;" they teach things suitable to their worldly affections and interests: "and the world heareth them," they who are of the same temper are seduced and led away by them.

So that the apostle's design in these words, is plainly to shew the great advantage which truth and the sincere professors of it have above error, and the teachers and disciples of it.

"Ye are of God." This phrase is very frequently, and very peculiarly used by St. John; it signifies to belong to God in a special and peculiar manner, and is the same with "being born of God," and "being the children of God," (chap. iii. 10.) "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God." Where you see to be "of God," and to be "the children of God," are the same thing: and so to be the children of the devil, and to be of the devil, are by this apostle used in the same sense, (chap. iii. 8.) "He that committeth sin is of the devil." And, (ver. 12.) "Cain was of that wicked one," that is, a child of the devil, as he had called such before, (ver. 10.) And because children do resemble their parents in nature and disposition, therefore those who are of a Divine temper and disposition, who relish the things of God, and are apt to embrace

the truths of God when they are duly propounded to them, are ready to be taught of God, are said likewise to be of God: (John viii. 47.) "He that is of God, heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." So here in the text, "Ye are of God;" ye are of a temper and disposition apt to relish Divine things, ready to embrace the truths of God, and ye have entertained them, and are his children, and are led by his Spirit, and have the Spirit of God dwelling in you; and this makes you victorious. "Ye have overcome them." He had spoken immediately before of false prophets and antichrist, by which he doth point out not one particular person, but the whole number and faction of false teachers, as he tells us, (chap. ii. 18.) that "now there are many antichrists. Ye are of God, and have overcome them." This hath enabled you to resist those seducing spirits, and made you too hard for them, that "ye are of God; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." The force of the reasoning is this: "Ye are of God," that is, ye are taught of God, and have received his doctrine, and are born again by the word of God, and are his children, and being his children, ye have his Spirit; and the Spirit of truth and of God is a stronger principle, than that spirit of error and seduction which is in the world, that is, the devil. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." The Spirit of truth is more powerful than the spirit of error and seduction; and consequently they that are of God, who sincerely embrace and obey the truth, are able to overcome all the temptations of the world to apostacy from the truth.

My work at this time shall be to shew, what ad-

vantage good men, and those who sincerely embrace and obey truth, have to secure them in the ways of truth and holiness, against all the temptations of the devil and the world. I say, in the ways of truth and holiness, because there is a strict connexion between a hearty embracing of the truth of God, and a sincere obedience to it. And the apostle speaks of both, in opposition to the gnostics, who did not only endeavour to seduce men to apostacy from Christian faith, but likewise from the practice of a holy life. Now to secure men against temptations to both these, they who are of God, who sincerely embrace and obey the truth, have a great advantage, because that spirit and principle, which rules and sways in them, is more powerful than that spirit which rules in the world and in the children of disobedience. "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world;" and that in these three respects:

First, Divine truth carries greater evidence along with it.

Secondly, The motives to persuade men to adhere to truth and holiness, are more operative and powerful.

Thirdly, There is a greater and more immediate assistance accompanies the truth of God, and they who entertain it are acted by a more powerful principle than that which is in the world.

First, Divine truth carries greater evidence along with it. As will appear if we consider three things:

I. The doctrines that are from God have more intrinsic goodness in them, and teach such things as are more worthy of God, and more likely to proceed from him.

II. The external confirmation of these doctrines is greater and hath more conviction in it.

III. The Spirit of God doth illuminate the minds of good men, and is concerned to lead them into the truth, and to secure them from dangerous and damnable errors.

I. The doctrines which are from God, have a more intrinsical goodness in them, and teach such things as are most worthy of God, and more likely to proceed from him. Whoever supposeth God to make a revelation of himself to men whereby to conduct them to happiness, must in all reason suppose such a Divine doctrine to contain plain rules and directions to that end, and powerful helps, motives, and encouragements, to enable and excite men to the observation of those rules. For a man would naturally reason, that God, who is so infinitely good, would, in revealing his will to men, aim at no other end, but the happiness of his creatures: and that he being infinitely wise as well as good, the means would be proportionable, and consequently that the laws and precepts which he gives would apparently tend to the happiness of mankind: and because, if men have immortal souls, and are designed to live for ever, their greatest happiness is that of another world; therefore it is reasonable to conclude, that those rules and directions should principally regard the eternal happiness of men in another life, and in subserviency to that, should respect likewise the temporal happiness of men in this world.

And such laws and rules being supposed, the next thing to be expected is, that God should consider the condition and circumstances of persons to whom these laws are given; and if they be averse to them, that they should be awakened and quickened to the observance of them, by such motives and

encouragements as are proper and powerful to that end; and if they be weak and impotent to the performance of what God's laws require, that they should be enabled and assisted by a proportionable strength.

Now the doctrine of the Christian religion, which our blessed Saviour revealed to the world, and (as we Christians say,) by Divine commission and authority, hath all these marks and characters of divinity upon it. The laws of it are plain and obvious to the common understanding of mankind; all men know what the precepts of piety, and goodness, and mercy, and righteousness, and integrity, and truth, and faithfulness, of meekness, and humility, and patience, and forgiveness, and forbearance, and charity, mean; and so I might instance in temperance and chastity, and all those other virtues and graces which the Christian religion requires of us, and recommends to us. These all tend to the advancement and perfection of our natures, and make us like to God, and capable of the enjoyment of him in the next life; and besides this, they do apparently conduce in all respects to our temporal happiness in this world. And excepting the case of persecution (to which God hath promised abundant recompence in another world,) the practice of these virtues is evidently to the advantage of particular persons in this world, and to the peace and happiness of human society.

And, because of the great corruption of human nature, and the strong inclinations of it to vice, the gospel offers proportionable arguments and encouragements to men to persuade them to their duty; an act of oblivion and pardon for what is past; perfect reconciliation to God in and through the

merits and mediation of our blessed Saviour, and the eternal rewards and punishments of another world; which to men that believe the immortality of their souls, and are not stupidly insensible of their interest, are the most powerful considerations in the world to take men off from sin, and to bring them to goodness.

And because the corruption of human nature hath brought a great weakness and impotency upon mankind, God is pleased in the gospel to offer to men the powerful assistance of his grace and Holy Spirit, to enable them to perform all this which he requires of them. And beyond this, what can we expect God should discover to men, in order to their happiness in this world, or the other? And in all these respects the doctrine of the gospel, revealed from heaven by the Son of God, hath, to any impartial considerer, infinitely the advantage of paganism or Mahometanism, or any other doctrine or institution that ever the world was acquainted withal.

But now, if we bring the doctrines of false prophets and seducing spirits, whom St. John calls antichrists, to this trial, we shall find that they are quite of another stamp, destitute of goodness, and calculated not for the happiness and benefit of men, but for base and unworthy ends; whereby it is evident, that the teachers of them are not "of God, but of the world," and "therefore they speak of the world, and the world heareth them." And of this I will give two instances; one in those false teachers the gnostics, intended by the apostle in this Epistle; and the other in a sort of seducers nearer to us in our own times.

As for the gnostics, besides their contradicting

and virtual renouncing the main principles of Christianity, by denying that Christ was really come in the flesh, or that he really died, or rose, affirming all this to be only in appearance; the sum of their doctrine was either a heap of unintelligible words and phrases, under a pretence of a high mystery; or a doctrine of liberty, as to all manner of vice and wickedness, under a pretence of perfection, and that whatever they did, they could not sin; both which at the first sight are as plain evidence as any reasonable man can desire, that such a doctrine could not be from God; nothing being more unlikely to be a Divine revelation, than such absurd and confused stuff as no man can understand, and which hath no tendency to make men better. But above all, nothing can be more unworthy of God, nor more unlikely to proceed from him, than such a doctrine as gives encouragement to vice and wickedness of life, under what pretence soever it be. For what can be more contrary to God, and a greater affront to the reason of mankind, than to let men loose to do the vilest and lewdest things, under pretence of perfection in goodness?

The other instance I intend is nearer at hand, and concerns us more, and that is in the church of Rome, and those false teachers which she sends abroad into the world, and which at this day swarm among us; and never did any character more unluckily agree to any sort of men than this of the apostle does to that church and the teachers of it, that "they are of the world, and therefore they speak of the world, and the world heareth them."

In which words there are three remarkable characters given of the false prophets and teachers.

1. That they are acted by a worldly spirit, and

carry on a secular interest and design; "they are of the world."

2. That they teach things suitable to their worldly interest and design, and therefore they speak ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου, "from the world," according to that worldly spirit that acts them, and rules in them.

3. Those that hearken to them are a sort of people like themselves, of worldly affections and interests; "the world heareth them."

1. They are acted by a worldly spirit, and carry on a secular interest and design of greatness and ambition, of dominion and tyranny, of riches and wealth. Any man that considers the church of Rome at this day, and by what steps and degrees, by what worldly ways and unworthy means, she hath attained to that power and wealth and greatness, to that dominion and tyranny, which now for several hundreds of years she hath exercised, not only over the consciences of men in the most cruel manner, but even over temporal princes and states, in commanding their treasures and armies, in deposing kings, and disposing of their kingdoms, and in all imaginable instances of secular dominion and tyranny, cannot but be satisfied by what spirit they are acted, and that they as visibly carry on a worldly interest and design, as the most ambitious secular prince ever did.

2. They teach things suitable to their worldly designs and interests. Let but any man impartially survey those which are the proper doctrines of the Romish church, and which we challenge for innovation and corruption of the truly ancient catholic and Christian doctrine, and it will at first sight be evident to him, whither these doctrines tend, and that they do not serve the ends of religion, but of worldly

greatness and dominion. What greater instance of ambition, than the claim of the universal supremacy of the bishop of Rome over all Christians and churches in the world, without the least ground, or indeed colour of ground, either from Scripture or antiquity; and not only of an universal spiritual power over Christians, but of an indirect temporal power over princes in order to spiritual ends, which may be extended to any thing, and hath been, upon occasion, to the donation of kingdoms, and the deposing of princes, and the transferring of temporal dominion from lawful and hereditary princes, to those who had no manner of right or title? What more arrogant and directly tending to the enslaving of mankind, than their pretence to infallibility, which yet they could never agree among themselves where to place? What greater tyranny can be exercised over mankind, than to oblige them to an implicit faith, and blind obedience to believe what the church believes, though they do not know what it is; and to do what the church commands, though they doubt never so much of the lawfulness of it? Than to hide the word of God from them, and to lock it up in an unknown tongue, and to deter them from the free use of that which was designed by God to be the great instrument of the salvation of mankind? Than not to let men exercise their understandings in the service of God; nor, when they join in public prayers, to suffer them to know what it is they ask of God; as if the priests' lips were so to preserve knowledge, as to keep it all to themselves, and not to make use of it for the benefit and edification of the people? And lastly, to impose upon men, under pain of damnation, the belief of doctrines, not only contrary to the true sense of Scripture, but to all the

sense and reason of mankind, as is the doctrine of transubstantiation? How is it possible to bring people into a greater subjection to the priests, and dependance upon them, than by auricular confession, and that unreasonable doctrine of making the efficacy of the sacraments to depend upon the intention of the priest; and consequently, to put it into the power of a malicious and bad man to damn all his parish? And to mention but one thing more, what better contrivance could be thought of to enrich the church, and drain the purses of the people, than their doctrines of purgatory and prayers for the dead, of indulgences and satisfaction, and their forms of sins and vices of all kinds, called the tax of the apostolic chamber? Can any man think that these and such-like doctrines are "of God," which do so directly serve the ends of covetousness and ambition? Any one that does not wilfully shut his eyes, may plainly see that such doctrines, and such teachers, are "of the world," and that they speak and teach these things out of a worldly interest and design.

And here I might take notice likewise, that "they speak from the world," also, in another sense, by shewing what worldly and indirect means (not to say wicked and sinful arts) they commonly make use of to make disciples and gain proselytes, by flattery and falsehood, by concealing and misrepresenting their own doctrines and practices, by defaming their adversaries with known fictions and calumnies, tempting men from their religion by promises of temporal advantages, which, when they have gained them, they do not always perform and make good. Can any thing be more opposite to the genius of true religion, than to promote it by means

so plainly contrary to the very nature and design of it?

3. Those who hearken to them and are seduced by them, are generally like themselves; "they speak from the world, and the world heareth them." Not but that men of very honest and sincere minds may be seduced into great errors, through prejudice or weakness, or a melancholy superstition: but generally such a religion as is calculated for the promoting of secular interest, and is carried on by secular arts, does gain upon carnal and worldly minds; and it is usually some worldly consideration or other that prevails with men to embrace and profess it. A religion that can find out ways to save men without sincere repentance and a good life, is very fit to make proselytes in the world; they that teach such doctrines speak from the world, and the world is very apt to hear them.

And thus I have done with the first thing, whereby it appears, that Divine truth carries great evidence along with it, namely, that the doctrines which are from God, have more intrinsical goodness in them, and teach such things as are more worthy of God, and more likely to proceed from him. I will be briefer in the rest.

II. The external confirmation of Divine doctrines is greater, and carries more conviction along with it. By external confirmation, I mean chiefly that of miracles. And though the pagan religion pretended to some, and our Saviour plainly foretold, that antichrists and false prophets should arise, and should "shew signs and wonders;" and St. Paul hath told us, that "the man of sin" should "come with signs, and wonders, and mighty power;" yet none of these are of any great consideration, in comparison of the

many, and great, and unquestionable miracles, which were so universally wrought for the establishment of the Christian religion, and continued for some ages; they bear no manner of proportion to them, neither for the nature, nor number, nor circumstances of them, so as to shake or weaken any man's belief of the Christian religion, which had so much a greater confirmation given to it; especially when our Saviour did foretell, that false prophets should do some things of this kind. For after a religion is established by plain and unquestionable miracles, such as for their number, nature, publickness, and continuance, and all imaginable circumstances of advantage, were never upon any occasion wrought in the world; I say, after this, it is not reasonable, that one or two single miracles or wonders pretended to, or really wrought by a false prophet, should bring in question the truth of a religion confirmed by a long series of the greatest and most unquestionable miracles.

Besides that the doctrine of it is such as is worthy of God, and most likely to proceed from him.*

As for the miracles pretended to by the church of Rome, they are generally so fantastical and ridiculous, and so unlike the works of God, and wrought to no end and purpose, not among unbelievers for their conviction, which was always the great end of miracles, but among themselves, and so destitute of credit, that the wisest among themselves are so far from believing them, that they are heartily ashamed of them, so that we need not trouble ourselves about them, for they are not likely to give any great con-

* See of this more at large, in the three last foregoing Sermons.

firmation to any doctrine, which stand in so much need of confirmation themselves.

III. Besides the goodness of the doctrines which are from God, and the external confirmation of them by miracles, which is a great advantage to the reception of them, the Spirit of God doth likewise illuminate good men, and those who are desirous to know the truth, and hath promised to lead them into it, and to assist them in discerning between truth and falsehood. So our Saviour hath assured us, (John vii. 17.) "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Besides that the doctrines which are from God do commonly carry the marks and characters of their own divinity upon them; the providence of God is likewise particularly concerned, that good men, and those who are of honest minds, and sincerely desirous to know the truth, should not be deceived in matters of so great consequence to the happiness and salvation of mankind. To the same purpose is that promise, (John xiv. 21.) "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him; and will manifest myself to him."

God is always ready to reveal his will to those who are sincerely desirous to do it, and will not suffer men of honest minds to err dangerously in matters wherein their eternal salvation is concerned.

Thus you see what advantage the Spirit of truth hath above the spirit of error and seduction; that Divine truth carries greater evidence along with it, both in respect of the goodness of the doctrines which are from God, and the great confirmation that is given to them, and the extraordinary illuminations

of God's Spirit, which is wont to accompany the truths of God to the minds of good men, who are ready and disposed to give entertainment to Divine truth.

I should now have proceeded to the second advantage which the Spirit of truth hath above the spirit of seduction, namely, that the motives to persuade men to adhere to truth and holiness, are more powerful and operative upon the minds of men, than the motives to the contrary.

And then, Thirdly, That those who embrace and obey the truth of God, have a greater assistance, and are acted by a more powerful spirit and principle, than any is in the world: and this seems to be more especially the meaning of that in the text, "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." But these I shall not now enter upon.

SERMON CCXXXII.

THE ADVANTAGES OF TRUTH, IN OPPOSITION TO ERROR.

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.—1 JOHN iv. 4, 5.

I PROCEED to the second advantage which the Spirit of truth hath above the spirit of error and seduction, namely, that the motives which good men have to persuade them to adhere to truth and holiness, are more powerful than the motives to the contrary. They who embraced the Christian religion, did firmly believe the eternal rewards and punishments of another world; and this principle of faith being fixed and rooted in them, made them victorious over all the temptations of the world, over all the allurements and terrors of it; because they were fully persuaded of the happiness and misery of another world; the happiness of those who continued steadfast in the faith and obedience of the gospel, and the dreadful misery and punishment of those who disobeyed the gospel of Christ, or apostatized from the profession of it. Hence it was that they were not to be moved by any temporal considerations, either of ease or advantage, or of trouble and persecution in this world. Their eternal interest lay so near their hearts, and they were so fully possessed with the belief of the everlasting rewards and punish-

ments of another life, that they overlooked the goods and evils of this life; and all temporal considerations, put into the scales against their everlasting interest, were of no weight and moment with them.

And this our apostle very particularly insists upon in this Epistle, (ch. v. 4, 5.) "Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world;" the children of God are victorious over the temptations of the world; and then he tells us what it is that makes them so, "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" The believing that "Jesus is the Son of God," infers the belief of his doctrine, and consequently of that eminent part of it, the eternal recompence of another world, which, whosoever firmly believes, will be able to resist and overcome all the temptations of this world. For by the belief of the Christian religion, and faith in the Son of God, we are fully assured of the reality and certainty of the mighty rewards and punishments of another world, though they be future and at a distance; and a firm persuasion of these things, makes them in some sort present to us, as to their efficacy and operation; for to a wise and considerate man, a great good, or a great evil, which he believes will certainly befal him, according as he manageth his affairs well or ill, though it be at some distance, is of greater force than a far lesser good or evil which is present and nearer at hand. And of this we see many instances in the temporal concerns of men. A prudent man will forego his present ease and pleasure, and part with a present advantage, lay down ready money, upon the certain prospect of a far greater

benefit that will come to him some years hence; and will undergo present pain and trouble, to prevent a far greater mischief and inconvenience; and upon this principle of the belief of future good and evil, all the great affairs of the world are managed. Upon this principle men plough and sow, and venture their estates in traffic to foreign parts, and trust out their present stock, and purchase reversions, and take physic, and cut off a limb, and run all those hazards of estate and life, which we see men every day do; and all this for the securing of some great advantage, or the preventing of some great mischief, which, though it be future and at a distance, yet they probably or certainly foresee will happen to them.

And this principle is so much the stronger, and of greater force and efficacy, in matters of greater moment and importance, where the good hoped for, or the evil feared, is infinitely great, and concerns us for ever. If we firmly believe the reality and certainty of it, no temporal advantage or affliction can come in competition with them, in the calculation and account of a wise man; because there is no proportion between finite and infinite, between the goods and evils which are temporal, and those which are eternal; though the one be seen, and the other not seen; though the one be present and near to us, and the other future and at a great distance.

Upon this principle the first Christians continued firm and steadfast in the belief and obedience of the gospel, and were bold and open in the profession of it, notwithstanding all the cruel assaults of persecution, though they hazarded the loss of all that was dear to them in this world, and exposed themselves to the suffering of whatever is grievous and

terrible to flesh and blood. They "gloried in tribulation;" and did not only patiently submit to the greatest sufferings, but heartily praised God, who "accounted them worthy to suffer for his name: they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that, in heaven, they had a better and more enduring substance; they were tortured not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection;" and when they were harassed with all the evils and calamities of human life, yet they fainted not, knowing "that their light affliction, which was but for a moment, would work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," having their minds fixed, "not upon the things which are seen, but upon the things which are not seen; the things which are seen being but temporal, but the things which are not seen being eternal."

Thus they overcame the world, not by the force and power of this world, but by the belief of another world, and of the mighty rewards and punishments of it. And this "faith purified their hearts," and reformed their lives, and made them steadfast and unmoveable in their holy profession, and raised their minds above all the temptations and terrors of present and sensible things.

Let us now see on the contrary what kind of motives and arguments false teachers use to seduce men to their pernicious ways. "They speak from the world," and commonly make use of base, and low, and temporal considerations, of little tricks and devices, and "all deceivableness of unrighteousness," (as the Scripture calls it) to make disciples and gain proselytes. They terrify them with temporal dangers and inconveniences, and represent to them suffering, and persecution, and death, in all

their frightful shapes, to deter them from profession of the true religion: they set before them all manner of worldly baits and allurements, ease, and wealth, and preferment; they promise them liberty from the strictness of those laws and rules which religion ties them up to. By these arts and arguments the gnostics of old used to tempt men from Christianity to shake their constancy in the profession of it; and the same ways are still put in practice by seducers at this day: they tell men of a glorious church that hath great power and interest in the world; they amuse them with a great deal of outward pomp and ceremony; they promise them preferment and great worldly advantages, by coming over to them; they threaten them with fire and faggot, with persecutions and massacres, and, where they have power, they hold them fast when they have gained them, by the terror of an Inquisition; they promise them liberty, and what by the looseness of their casuistical divinity, and by the easiness of their penances and absolutions, and the cheats of their indulgences, they have devised ways to reconcile almost the worst life that any man can lead, with fair hopes of getting to heaven at last. They tell them, indeed, they must make some stop in purgatory: but they have so many ways to release men from those sufferings, as do very much abate the terror of them, to any man that hath but credulity enough to believe them: for, besides the vast treasure of merits in the common bank of the church, which the pope hath in his disposal, and which nobody ought to doubt but that they are faithfully employed by him for the ease and deliverance of souls in purgatory; I say, besides these, there are so many particular ways of effecting this

business, that a man of ordinary discretion, with an indifferent purse, may so order the matter, that he shall only pass through purgatory, but need not make any stay in that place of torments.

But though these be their common motives and inducements to draw men to their communion, yet they do not wholly omit the arguments taken from the eternal happiness and misery of men in another world; for, to give them their due, there are no people in the world more prodigal of eternal salvation and damnation: they promise the one upon the easiest terms, and threaten the other upon the least displeasure: if a man be in their communion, he can hardly fail of salvation; and if he be out of it, and differ from them in the least point of faith, though but of their own making, he is sure to be damned, though he had the graces and virtues, the sanctity and charity, of an angel: and this is the true reason why these arguments, which are so powerful in themselves, signify so little from their mouths; because every man that hath read the Bible and understands the Christian religion, plainly sees, that they have made terms of salvation and damnation quite different from those which God hath constituted; so that these motives, which are so strong and mighty in themselves, quite lose their edge and force, when they are managed by seducers in so undue a manner, and to ends and purposes so cross to the main design of Christianity. This is the second advantage which the Spirit of truth hath above the spirit of error and seduction, that the motives to persuade men to adhere to truth and holiness, are really in themselves more powerful than the motives to error and seduction.

Thirdly, Those who sincerely embrace and obey

the truth of God, have a greater assistance, and are acted by a more powerful spirit and principle, than that which is in the world; and this seems more especially to be the meaning of the reason here given in the text, why the Spirit of truth is victorious over the spirit of error and seduction; "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world;" that is, the Spirit which is in good men, is more powerful than the devil, that evil spirit which inspires and acts the "children of disobedience."

For the farther explication of this, I will do these three things:

I. Shew that there are these two principles in the world, the Spirit of God, and the devil, very active and powerful in good and bad men.

II. That the Spirit of God, which is in good men, is greater than he that is in the world.

III. In what ways the Spirit of God doth move and assist good men.

I. That there are these two principles in the world, the Spirit of God, and the devil, very active and powerful, the one in good, the other in bad men. This is very credible in the general, from the universal tradition and consent of mankind, in the belief of good and evil spirits attending men, and prompting them to good and evil; but we who embrace the revelation of the gospel have a much firmer and surer ground for it, nothing being more plain and frequent in Scripture, than that the Holy Spirit of God guides and assists good men in doing the will of God; and that the devil "works in the children of disobedience," and is always ready to tempt men to and promote any evil action or de-

sign. From hence it is, that the Scripture does almost every where ascribe all good motions and actions to the operation and influence of God's grace and Holy Spirit upon the minds of men; and the sins of men to the temptation and suggestion of the devil; and this is so well known to any one conversant in the Holy Scriptures, that I need not cite particular texts for the proof of it.

It is true, indeed, that the motions of God's Holy Spirit, and the suggestions of the devil, are very secret to us, and imperceptible by us, so that no man can say certainly, that this good inclination or action is an immediate motion of God's Holy Spirit in me, or that evil thought and design is an immediate suggestion of the devil; it is sufficient for us, that we are assured from Divine revelation in general, that the Spirit of God very frequently does, and is always ready to assist good men in the doing or suffering of God's will; as the evil spirit, where God permits him, is always busy to tempt and seduce men to evil. And this ought not to be strange to us, because our Saviour hath expressly told us, that the Spirit of God works in men after an imperceptible manner; (John iii. 8.) "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Though we do not know the manner of the Spirit's working, nor perceive the operations of it upon our minds, yet we find the effects of it in the renovation and sanctification of our hearts. Thus, by undeniable arguments, men are assured of a Divine providence governing the world, though men do not always see, nor can make out to others, the particular interpositions of it, so as to say that

this or that was an immediate effect of Divine Providence. To know certainly that a thing is, it is not necessary that we should be able to give a particular account of all its operations, and the manner of them; these may be hidden from us, and yet we may be sufficiently assured by other arguments that there is such a thing. Men are sure they have souls, though they can give no account how the actions of understanding, and remembrance, and sensation, are produced by them: so it is in the present case; we are sufficiently assured from the word of God, that good and bad spirits have a great influence upon the minds of men, though we be not conscious to their operations, and the manner of them.

II. The Spirit of God which is in good men, is greater than he that is in the world; he is more able and ready to assist men to good purposes, than the devil is to tempt and help forward that which is evil. And this will appear, if we consider these three things:

1. The Spirit of God is more powerful than the devil; and this is so evident in itself, that it needs no proof.

2. The Spirit of God is as forward and willing to assist men to good purposes, as the devil is to the contrary. That extremity of malice and envy, which is in evil spirits, does, no doubt, make them very forward and active to do all the mischief they can to mankind, by tempting and seducing them to sin: but, on the other hand, the utmost perfection of goodness which in God is more and greater than the malice of the devil, will incline more strongly the Holy Spirit of God to pity and aid and help good men, than the malice of the devil can urge

him to procure the harm and mischief of mankind; and if we could suppose their will and inclinations equal, yet our comfort is, their power is not.

3. The Spirit of God hath a more free and immediate access to the minds of good men, and a more intimate conjunction with, and operation upon them, than the devil. The Spirit of God is always present to us, and willing to dwell and abide in us, and ready to help and assist us, if we be ready to obey his dictates, and comply with his holy and blessed motions; if we did not resist, and quench, and grieve him, he would always take up his abode and habitation in us, and would be continually exciting, and guiding, and assisting us to that which is good; he knows our hearts, and sees all the secrets of our souls; knows all our inclinations, knows our weakness and our danger, what assistance we want, and when it will be most seasonable; and is as intimate to us, and as conscious to all the motions of our spirits, as we ourselves are.

But now the devil is under great restraint, and cannot make nearer approaches to any man than God permits him; he does not know our hearts, nor can pry into the secret of our thoughts. God knows, but the devil does but guess at the thoughts, and designs, and inclinations of men; he hath no power over us, nor any access to us, but what we give him, or God permits. By obedience to God's will, and resisting the temptations of the devil to sin and disobedience, we may not only keep out the devil, but keep him at a great distance, and make him flee from us, so that we shall have little trouble or molestation from him; for though he be unwearied in his malicious attempts to ruin our souls, yet, because he cannot be every where, he haunts those

most where he hath the greatest hopes of success; and is too eager and intent upon mischief to employ his time and temptations where he hath been often foiled, and hath reason to despair of victory. So that, if all things be considered, it is our own fault if we want the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, or if the devil have any great power over us: for God does not usually, but upon great provocation, take away his Holy Spirit from men, and lay them open to the assaults and temptations of the devil. If any be led captive by the devil, at his pleasure, it is those who have wilfully forsaken God, and "sold themselves to do wickedly."

III. We will consider in what ways the Spirit of God doth move and assist good men. These two ways:

1. By exciting good motions in us, and enabling us to bring them to effect.

2. By supporting us under persecution for religion.

1. By exciting good motions in us, and enabling us to bring them to effect. These the apostle puts together. (Phil. ii. 13.) "For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure." It is he that stirs up good inclinations in us, and carries them on to effect. And this he makes an argument why we should be diligent and industrious in the work of our salvation, because God is so ready to assist us: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleasure."

2. By supporting us under persecution for religion. In case of extraordinary temptations, and violent assaults upon our constancy in religion, by fierce and cruel persecutions, God affords imme-

diate and extraordinary supports to good men, whereby they are many times borne up under the greatest sufferings, not only with patience, but with comfort and "joy unspeakable, and full of glory." Wherever God suffers good men to be tempted above humanity, he affords them an immediate Divine assistance, to bear them up, and make them victorious. So St. Peter tells us, (1 Pet. iv. 14.) "That those who suffer and are reproached for the name of Christ, the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon them." So likewise, St. Paul, (1 Cor. x. 13.) speaking of those who had not yet been set upon by any sharp persecution, "No persecution hath taken you, but such as is common to man," εἰ μὴ ἀνθρώπινος, nothing but what is human, what the spirit of man may bear: but if such a case happen, of temptation above nature, and the spirit of a man be too weak to support itself under it, God will, in that case, afford men immediate and extraordinary supports and comforts: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it:" and then it immediately follows; "wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry;" because God hath promised such an extraordinary assistance, in case of persecution for religion, therefore he encourageth them to continue steadfast in the profession of Christianity, and cautions them against apostacy to the heathen idolatry.

The inference from all this discourse is, to encourage us to continue steadfast in the truth, and in the practice of our holy religion, "to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," and not to suffer ourselves to be shaken "with every wind of

doctrine," by the arts and cunning of those who "lie in wait to deceive; who creep into houses, and lead captive silly women, laden with sins, and led away by divers lusts." You see what kind of persons these false teachers used to proselyte; women of no virtue, of a prostituted reputation, "laden with sins, and led away with divers lusts;" a character that notoriously agrees to some seducers of our times.

Therefore, let us "continue in the things which we have heard," and not suffer ourselves to be "moved from our steadfastness." The more we consider our religion, and compare it with the unquestionable revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures, the greater reason we shall see to adhere to it. The doctrines of our religion are of God, plainly contained in his word, and such as are worthy of him, and likely to proceed from him, and tend to the good and happiness of mankind, to make men really better, and to qualify them for that happiness which God hath promised to holy souls. The doctrines of our religion are free from the suspicions of a worldly interest and design. But if we consider the doctrines and innovations of that church which pretends to be the only Christian catholic society in the world, we shall find that they are of another stamp, and of a quite contrary tendency; that they savour so rankly of a worldly interest, that any impartial man would, at first sight, judge them to be the contrivances of worldly, covetous, and ambitious men, and that they did not look like Divine truths, and doctrines that are of God, but that they are of the world; and therefore, they that propagate them, and would seduce men to them, "speak from the world, and the world heareth them."

SERMON CCXXXIII.

THE EVIDENCES OF THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION; WITH THE CAUSE AND DANGER OF INFIDELITY.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.—2 COR. iv. 3, 4.

I SHALL explain these words, and then proceed to handle many things contained in them.

"If our gospel be hid," or veiled; so by this metaphor the apostle alludes to what he had said in the latter part of the foregoing chapter, concerning the veil which was upon Moses' face, and upon the hearts of the Jews, so that they could not see to the end of that dispensation. There was a great deal of obscurity in that administration: "But the veil is done away in Christ." The gospel is a clear revelation, and sufficiently conspicuous in itself: and now, if it be hid from any, the fault is not in the obscurity of the object, but in the blindness of men's minds.

"If the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." To them that deserve to perish, because they will not see.

"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not." Some of the fathers, as St. Augustine, and St. Chrysostom, and several of the Greek scholiasts, read these words otherwise;

"In whom God hath blinded the eyes of the men of this world who believe not;" and so refer this blindness to God's permission; in which sense he is said elsewhere in Scripture, "to harden men's hearts." The reason why they choose this reading of the words rather than the other, was in opposition to the Marcionites and Manichees; the former of which sects made use of this text to countenance their opinion of two gods; the one of the Old Testament, whom they called the just God; the other of the New, whom they styled the good God: the former of these, say they, made the world, and is therefore, here called "the god of this world." The Manichees made use of this text to prove that the devil, whom they made the principle of all evil and imperfection, was the maker of this world, and is therefore called the god of it.

But there is no need why for this reason we should depart from the usual reading of the words; for there is nothing in the true importance of them, that can give countenance to these errors. For the devil, though he did not make this world, may be said to be the god of it, upon a very good account, because the greatest part of the world, being sunk into idolatry and wickedness, were become his lot and portion, who worshipped him as God, and did his works, and therefore were part of his dominion. So St. John tells us, (1 John iii. 8.) "He that committeth sin is of the devil;" and, (chap. v. 19.) "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness," ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, which may be rendered more agreeably to the opposition which the apostle intended, "is subject to the evil one," is in his power, and under his dominion. According to which Plutarch tells us, that "every unreasonable

and brutish nature belongs to the lot of bad spirits." So that in this sense the devil may very well be said to be "the god of this world," as he is elsewhere called by our Saviour, "the prince of this world;" (John xii. 31.) "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out;" and, (John xiv. 30.) "The prince of this world cometh." And so the apostle, (Eph. vi. 12.) "The ruler of the darkness of this world."

"Lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them," εἰς τὸ μὴ αὐγάσαι, "lest they should see," or "behold the light of the glorious gospel," for so Hesychius tells us, that αὐγάζω αὐγάζομαι, is ὁρῶ καὶ βλέπω. It is called "the glorious gospel of Christ," because of the glorious confirmation that was given to it by his miraculous resurrection and ascension, and his sending the Holy Ghost into the world; and Christ is said to be "the image of God," because the power of the Deity did shew forth itself in the miracles which he wrought.

The words being thus explained, the most material things that offer themselves to our consideration in them, are these three:

First, The full and clear evidence which we have of the truth of the gospel, or of the Christian religion, which the apostle expresseth to us in these words, "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ."

Secondly, The cause of infidelity, notwithstanding all the evidence which the gospel carries along with it, which the apostle expresseth in these words, "in whom the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not."

Thirdly, The dangerous state of those who, having the gospel propounded to them, do not believe it. The apostle tells them, that they are lost and

undone. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that perish."

I begin with the first of these, namely, the full and clear evidence which we have of the truth of the gospel, or Christian religion. The only thing that can give us full assurance that any religion is true, is, if we can be satisfied, that it is from God; for being once satisfied of that, there can remain no doubt of the truth of any thing that comes from him, it being an essential part of the notion which every man hath of God, that he is "a God of truth."

Now there are two things must concur to give the mind of man full satisfaction that any religion is from God.

First, If the person that declares this religion give testimony of his Divine authority, that is, that he is sent and commissioned by God to that purpose.

Secondly, If the religion which he declares contain nothing in it, that is plainly repugnant to the nature of God. I say, these two must concur; for though I could suppose a person to bring the highest testimony imaginable of his Divine mission and authority, suppose he should work a miracle for the confirmation of his doctrine; yet, if there were any thing in the doctrine plainly repugnant to the natural notions which I have of God, I could not receive it as from God; the reason of which is plainly this—I can have no assurance that that is from God, which, if it were true, I should be uncertain whether there was a God or not. I cannot possibly have any greater assurance that any thing is from God, than I have that there is a God; and I have no greater assurance that there is a God, than I have of his essential perfections; as, that he is good, and powerful, and wise, and just, &c. For

by the very same arguments that I come to know that there is a God, I know likewise that he must necessarily have these perfections. So that, if any thing should be offered to me as a revelation from God, which plainly contradicts those natural notions which I have of him, I must necessarily reject it, yea, though it were backed with a miracle; because no man can at the same time believe that there is a God of such and such perfections, and entertain any thing as from him, which evidently contradicts those perfections. And as this is reasonable in itself, so it is clear from Scripture. (Deut. xiii. 1—3.) "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign, or a wonder: and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods (which thou hast not known), and let us serve them: thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet." Here is the very case put, which I am speaking of; a prophet comes and preacheth the worship of idols, as the sun, moon, stars, &c. and for the confirmation of this he is supposed to work a miracle; and yet, notwithstanding this, we are forbidden to hearken to him, because the doctrine that he brings does evidently contradict the natural notions which I have of God.

From all which it appears, that these two things must concur, to give us full satisfaction that any religion is from God; namely, first, That the person that declares this religion, gives testimony of his Divine authority, that he is sent and commissioned from God to that purpose. And,

Secondly, That the religion which he declares contains nothing in it that is plainly repugnant to the nature of God.

Now to bring this to my present purpose, I should shew these two things concerning the Christian religion:

First, As to the Divine authority of the person that declares this religion to the world, that he was sent and commissioned by God to that purpose.

Secondly, As to the religion itself, that there is nothing in it that is repugnant to the nature of God. I intend chiefly to speak of the first of these: for I dare say, any one that will freely and without prejudice consider the Christian religion, as it is laid down in the Scriptures, and not as it hath been abused by the wanton wits of some, and the designs of others, will find nothing in it but what is very suitable to the nature of God, and worthy of him: he shall find nothing in the propositions of faith, but what is suitable to the perfections of the Divine nature, and hath a proper influence upon a godly practice; nothing in the precepts of life, but what plainly tends to the perfection of human nature, and the advantage and happiness of mankind; nothing in the arguments and motives to obedience, as, namely, the love of Christ in dying for us, the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, and the rewards and punishments of another world, but what is very accommodate to our nature, and suitable to the wisdom, and goodness, and justice of God: and these three, the propositions of faith, the precepts of life, the arguments and motives to obedience, do constitute the Christian religion, and make up the whole gospel. Concerning most of these, I have elsewhere treated at large; therefore I shall now apply myself chiefly to the first thing, namely, to shew that we have abundant satisfaction of the Divine autho-

rity of the person that declares this religion to the world.

Now because we live at a great distance from the age wherein this revelation of the gospel by Jesus Christ was made to the world, it will be requisite for our clearer proceeding in this matter, to consider distinctly these three things:

First, What evidence those who heard this doctrine of the gospel immediately from our Saviour had for his Divine authority. And this inquiry only respects the disciples of our Saviour, and the rest of the Jews to whom he preached.

Secondly, What evidence those had who received this doctrine by the preaching of the apostles. And this concerns those to whom the gospel was published by the apostles after our Saviour's death.

Thirdly, What evidence after-ages, until the present time, have of this. And this properly concerns us, who live at a great distance from the times of the first publication of the gospel.

And according to these three differences of time, there are likewise but three ways whereby we can come to the knowledge of matter of fact; and they are all such as are capable of giving us sufficient assurance.

The first is by the testimony of our own senses; and this was the advantage of those who heard our Saviour's doctrine, and saw his miracles.

The second by the report and relation of credible eye and ear witnesses; and this advantage those had who heard the apostles.

The third by a constant and uncontrolled relation derived down successively from one age to another, either by word or writing, or both; which is the way whereby the ages since the apostles to this

day have had the Christian religion derived down to them.

First, To consider what evidence those who heard the doctrine of the gospel immediately from our Saviour himself might have of his Divine authority. Now there are but four ways that I can at present imagine (setting aside an internal revelation in every man's mind) whereby men may be sufficiently satisfied of the Divine authority of any person.

I. If it be prophesied of him, and foretold by persons divinely inspired, that God would send such an one as his messenger and prophet into the world, and afterward such a person comes, to whom all the circumstances of those prophecies do agree.

II. By the testimony of an immediate voice from heaven.

III. By a power of working miracles.

IV. By the gift of prophecy, proved and made good by the accomplishment of his own predictions.

Now I shall shew that those who lived in our Saviour's time, and conversed with him, were capable of satisfaction concerning his Divine authority all these four ways. I shall begin with the

I. First, They were capable of being eye-witnesses that Christ was the great prophet and messenger of God, the Messias prophesied of and foretold in the Old Testament. And here I do reasonably take for granted the Divine authority of the Old Testament, and that the prophecies therein contained are of Divine inspiration; because those to whom our Saviour ordinarily preached, were only the Jews, who acknowledged the Divine authority of those books; and therefore the accomplishment of those prophecies in the person of our Saviour, must needs be a satisfactory argument to them, that he was the Messias foretold.

Now to shew that the disciples of our Saviour, and the rest of the Jews, were capable of receiving full satisfaction in this, that Jesus Christ was the Messias prophesied of in the Old Testament, I shall proceed in these steps:

1. That the prophecies of the Old Testament fix a time for the coming of the Messias; they give certain marks and signs whereby it may be known when the Messias would come; as, that he should come when the government should utterly be lost from Judah: (Gen. xlix. 10.) "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah till Shiloh come;" by whom the ancient Jews did understand the Messias; and nothing but plain malice against Christ, and the Christian religion, makes the modern Jews to depart herein from the sense of their ancient masters. That he should come before the destruction of the second temple; (Hag. ii. 6—9.) "For thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." From whence it is plain, that this house should remain when "the Desire of all nations," that is, the Messias (according to the interpretation of the ancient Jews) should come, and his presence should be the glory of this second temple, and make it excel the first. And much to the same purpose; (Mal. iii. 1.) "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, (that is,

the Messias) shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." That he should come at the end of so many weeks of years, "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem," and after so many weeks of years should be cut off, and after that "the city of Jerusalem and sanctuary should be destroyed and made desolate," (Dan. ix. 24—27.) So that you see the prophecies of the Old Testament do fix and ascertain the time of the Messias' coming, both by infallible marks and signs, concomitant and consequent, and by an exact computation of years.

2. That the time fixed by those prophecies for the coming of the Messias is already past. And this appears, in that all those marks and signs, which it was foretold should accompany and follow the coming of the Messias, are come to pass, and the time limited for the coming of the Messias is long since expired.

For, (1.) The sceptre is long since departed from Judah. The Jews are now dispersed among all nations, their government lost, their families confounded, insomuch that they do not at this day know those of the tribe of Judah from others. At the captivity, the government was not utterly lost, for they had a prince of the captivity; or at least it was interrupted but for seventy years, and then it was restored to them again: but now the sceptre hath been departed, and the government lost for sixteen hundred years.

(2.) The second temple is destroyed, to which it was foretold, that "the Desire of all nations should come."

(3.) The city is destroyed and made desolate,

which was foretold should be "after the cutting off of the Messias."

(4.) The "seventy weeks of years are accomplished" and expired long since, which were to begin from "the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem," and to end at the coming of the "Messias the Prince." And whether we fix the beginning of these weeks in the first or second year of Cyrus, or in the reign of one of the Dariuses or Artaxerxeses (for by universal consent it must begin in some of them) it matters not to my present purpose: for wherever it be fixed, these weeks are long since expired.

3. And consequently the Messias is already come. For if the predictions of the Old Testament be true, which limit his coming to a certain time, which is fixed both by infallible marks, and by an account of years; I say, if these predictions be true, that he should come at such a time, and that time is past, then he is already come.

The Jews seek to evade the force of this argument by this pitiful shift, that the promises and predictions of the Messias were not absolute, but conditional; that is, he should come at such a time, if the sins and impenitency of men did not hinder. To this I answer,

(1.) This grants that the time for the coming of the Messias is past.

(2.) The reason that they give why God hath deferred the accomplishment of those prophecies and promises, is, because of the impenitency and wickedness of the people of the Jews at that time; which will agree very well with the history of the gospel, and give us a very good account how they came to reject the Messias; because they were so wicked,

and their unbelief and impenitency were so great at that time.

(3.) There is no such condition any where expressed in any of those prophecies.

(4.) It is unreasonable that there should be such a condition; that the impenitency of men should hinder the coming of him, who was to bring the world to repentance, that is, to do that on his part which is sufficient to that end.

(5.) Nothing could bring the veracity of God into question more, than to make such predictions conditional, as, by the concurrent testimony of so many prophets, have the time of their accomplishment so punctually defined, and have not either a condition expressly fixed to them, or in the nature of the thing necessarily implied: and if this were not so, any one might pretend to be a true prophet, though the event proved never so contrary to his prediction.

(6.) It appears out of the books of the Jews to have been a constant tradition among them, that the Messias should come when the state of the people was most degenerate, and there was the greatest corruption and dissolution of manners among them. And if this be so, then their wickedness and impenitency could be no obstacle and impediment to the fulfilling of the promises and predictions, concerning the Messias.

I should have added in the next place, that the prophecies and promises in the Old Testament concerning the Messias, do all exactly, both as to the time, and all other circumstances, agree to Jesus Christ, who was born at Bethlehem, who gave himself out to be the Messias, and whom we Christians own to be so. But this I reserve for the next opportunity.

SERMON CCXXXIV.

THE EVIDENCES OF THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.—2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

In discoursing on these words, I have begun to shew, how those who heard the doctrine of the gospel immediately from our Saviour, might be satisfied concerning his Divine authority; and I mentioned four ways by which such persons might receive full satisfaction.

I. By the agreement of the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament to our Saviour.

II. By the testimony of an immediate voice from heaven.

III. By the power of working miracles.

IV. By the gift of prophecy, proved and made good by the accomplishment of his own predictions.

In discoursing of the first of these, I proceeded by these steps:

1. That the prophecies of the Old Testament did fix a time for the coming of the Messias, and gave certain marks and signs whereby it might be known when the Messias would come.

2. That the time fixed by those prophecies for the coming of the Messias is already past.

3. And consequently, that the Messias is already come. Thus far I have gone; and now add,

4. The prophecies and promises of the Old Testament concerning the Messias, do all exactly, both as to the time and all other circumstances, agree to Jesus Christ, that was born at Bethlehem, who gave himself out to be the Messias, and whom we Christians own to be so.

1. The time specified in those predictions agree to him. When he came into the world, the government was departed from Judah; for they were then in subjection to the Romans; and Herod their king, who was put into the government by the Romans, was an Idumæan. He came into the second temple, which, notwithstanding its being re-edified by Herod, might justly be accounted the same, it not having been again destroyed by any enemy, but only pulled down in order to the beautifying and enlarging of it; notwithstanding which Josephus every where calls it the same temple; for he reckons but two temples—the one, that which Solomon built, which continued till the captivity of Babylon; the other, that which Zerubbabel built, and that he says continued till the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. And not long after our Saviour's death, the city of Jerusalem and the sanctuary were utterly demolished, and "the end thereof was with a flood;" there was a total devastation of them; which plainly shews the seventy weeks did also expire about that time, wherever we fix the beginning of them; because the prophecy of Daniel tells us plainly, that towards the expiration of them, the city and the sanctuary were to be destroyed; which was fulfilled with a great deal of severity, as if there were some extraordinary cause of those fearful judgments which came upon them. And indeed we find, that after they had committed the great sin "of crucifying

the Lord of life," they gave up themselves to all manner of wickedness, "filling up the measure of their sins, that wrath might come upon them to the uttermost;" insomuch, that Josephus tells us, "That he did verily believe, that if the Romans had not come at that time to destroy them, either the earth would have swallowed up their city, or a flood have overwhelmed, or thunder and lightning, or fire from heaven, would have consumed them, like Sodom and Gomorrah; for (says he) this generation was much more wicked than they were."

And, which is a very considerable argument to the Jews, he came at the time when their whole nation were in expectation of the Messias; and, indeed, the whole world were about that time in expectation of a prince out of Judea. That the Jews did expect the Messias about this time, appears by the famous saying of one of their greatest rabbies, Elias, that there should be two thousand years before the law, two thousand years the law should last, and two thousand years should be the time of the Messias: and, according to the most exact chronology, it was much about the four thousandth year of the world that Christ was born. That a great part of the world besides were at that time in expectation of a prince to spring out of Judea, appears from those known testimonies of Suetonius and Tacitus: *Percrebuerat toto oriente vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut Judea profecti rerum potirentur*, saith Suetonius; and Tacitus to the same purpose. Both agree in the words of this prophecy, which seem to be taken out of the prophecy of Micah, speaking of Bethlehem, in the land of Judea; "Out of thee shall come a governor." And Suetonius tells us farther, that the belief and

expectation of this among the Jews was so great at that time, that this was the cause of their rebelling against the Romans. A just judgment of God upon them, that those who had rejected the true Messias, should be deluded to their own ruin by the hopes of a false one.

2. All other circumstances of those promises and prophecies, are exactly answered in the history and relation which the gospel gives of him. He was emphatically "the seed of the woman," according to the first and very obscure promise made to our first parents, (Gen. iii. 15.) "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head:" I say, he was emphatically "the seed of the woman," being, as our books of the gospel tell us, born of a pure virgin, which never knew man. He was the seed of Abraham, according to the second promise of him made to Abraham, (Gen. xii. 3.) "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." He was "a prophet like unto Moses," being a great worker of miracles above any of the prophets, as Moses also was; and by whom God gave a new law, as he did by Moses, according to the other famous promise of him, (Deut. xviii. 15.) "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me."

He was of the tribe of Judah, and of the seed of David, as it was foretold the Messias should be; therefore he is called in the gospel, "the Son of David;" and the apostle to the Hebrews (chap. vii. 14.) appeals to the Jews concerning this, as a thing clear and acknowledged among them, "It is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah," which he would not have affirmed to the Jews without proof, if it had not been granted by them.

For the other, that he was of the seed of David,

the Jews will by no means admit as a thing at all evident from the history of the gospel concerning him: for, say they, if that appear any where, we should find it in his genealogy; but there we find no such matter; there indeed we have the genealogy of Joseph very differently related by the two evangelists, Matthew and Luke: but what is this to the genealogy of Christ, when the Christians themselves avowedly declare, that Joseph was not his father? It is granted that Joseph was of David's line; but to prove that Christ was really descended from David, instead of the genealogy of Joseph, they should have shewn Mary's.

This is a very malicious and spiteful objection, and the Jews insist very much upon it: but yet I think it is capable of a very satisfactory answer, in which I shall proceed by these steps.

(1.) We will grant, that both the genealogies of our Saviour, that in Matthew and that in Luke, are intended to shew that Joseph was of Abraham's and David's line, and that neither of them is the genealogy of Mary. Some indeed have thought so, but it seems to me with very little probability: I incline much rather to Grotius's excellent conjecture about it, that Matthew's genealogy gives us an account of the succession of the royal family down as low as Joseph, and that in St. Luke the direct series of Joseph's ancestors.

(2.) The Jews grant that it hath been an ancient tradition among Christians, that Joseph and Mary were of the same family, and that Mary was Virgo, ἐπίκληρος, one that had no brethren, an heiress, or coheiress, and so according to the Jewish custom she was bound to marry in her family; which the Jews were especially careful of in the family of David,

to preserve the succession of the royal line, of which the Messias was to come.

(3.) The Jews have nothing to object against this which shews it improbable.

(4.) If so, that they were of the same family, then the genealogy of Joseph, though not directly and expressly, yet by consequence, was the genealogy of Mary; and consequently, those genealogies in the gospel do sufficiently shew that Christ was the Son of David.

(5.) It cannot be imagined that the evangelists should have omitted the genealogy of Mary, if it had not been included in that of Joseph, especially St. Matthew, who in his genealogy expressly tells us, that he intended to shew that he was the Son of David, and also denies Joseph to have been his real father.

(6.) If there had been any question, whether Mary was of the line of David, the Jews would certainly in that time have rejected him from being the Messias, upon that very account; nothing more plausible for them to have said than this—that he pretended to have no father, and to be born of a virgin, who was not of the line of David, how could he then be the Messias, who was to be "of the seed of David?" But that he was always owned by the Jews to be of that seed, appears by the title so frequently given to him of the Son of David.

It was prophesied that the Messias should be born in Bethlehem of Judea, (Mic. v. 2.) which you find accordingly fulfilled, (Matt. ii. 6.) the providence of God so ordering it, that Augustus should then lay a general tax, which occasion brought up Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem; not only that she might be delivered there, but that their names being

there entered, their family might be ascertained, and there might no doubt afterward arise, but that they were of the line of David.

It was foretold he should be "born of a virgin," (Isa. vii. 14.) which you see accordingly fulfilled, (Matt. i.) That this is not the primary, but the mystical sense, of that place in Isaiah, I think may without prejudice be granted to the Jews, who in innumerable places of the Old Testament, do, besides the first and literal sense, allow of a mystical one; and if it be objected that this is only the saying of us Christians, that Christ was born of a pure virgin; to them it is easily answered, that if this be foretold of the Messias, whoever he be, that he shall be born of a virgin, as the Jews generally grant, we have as much assurance of this, as they can have, or imagine to have of theirs, whenever he should come. For it is not any report or tradition that can give credit to so strange a thing, but the unquestionable miracles which he wrought, which prove him to come from God, and consequently to be no impostor, but to be all that he pretended he was.

It was foretold of him that he should be a great prophet and teacher; (Deut. xviii. 15.) "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me." (Isa. lxi. 1.) "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor," &c. (Ezek. xxxiv. 23.) "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd." And, (chap xxxvii. ver. 24.) "And David my servant shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them." And this was eminently

fulfilled in that he foretold several future contingents; as, his own crucifixion, Peter's denial of him, the destruction of Jerusalem, the rising of false Christs, and false prophets, (which I shall particularly consider hereafter,) the descending of the Holy Ghost, and the admirable success of the gospel in the world; in that he preached so pure and perfect a doctrine to the world, and with so much authority; a doctrine so excellent and reasonable, so suitable to the necessities, and agreeable to the reason of mankind; a doctrine which tendeth so much to the perfecting of human nature, and to the peace and happiness of human society, above any other institution in the world.

It was foretold that he should do many and great miracles, and such as should be beneficial to men, (Isa. xxxv. 5, 6.) "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." And was not all this eminently accomplished in Jesus Christ? What greater, or more public, or more frequent and numerous, or more beneficial miracles, can almost be imagined, than Christ did? So that we may say to the Jews, as some of them did to the pharisees in our Saviour's time, You talk of a Messias to come; "yet when he is come, will he do greater works than this man hath done?"

It was foretold of him, that the people should receive him with joy and triumph when "he came riding upon an ass to Jerusalem," (Zach. ix. 9.) which we find fulfilled, Matt. xxi.

It was prophesied that he should suffer many things, and be rejected, and despised of men. (Psal. xxii. 6.) "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach

of men, and despised of the people." (Isa. liii. 3.) "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." Which we find fulfilled all along in the history of the gospel.

It was prophesied that he should be sold for thirty pieces of silver, (Zach. xi. 12.) which we find fulfilled, Matt. xxvii. 9. That when he who was "the shepherd was smitten, the sheep should be scattered," (Zach. xiii. 7.) which was accomplished, Matt. xxvii. 56. "All the disciples forsook him and fled." That he should be scourged and buffeted, and spit upon, (Isa. l. 6.) "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting;" which you find punctually accomplished, Matt. xxvii.

It was foretold that he should die a violent death, (Isa. liii. 8.) "He was cut off out of the land of the living." (Dan. ix. 26.) "Messias the Prince shall be cut off." That he should undergo all these sufferings with the greatest patience, (Isa. liii. 7.) "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." That he should suffer all these things not for himself, but for sinners, (Isa. liii. 5.) he "was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." And, (ver. 6.) "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." And, (ver. 8.) "For the transgression of my people was he stricken." And, (ver. 10.) "His soul was

made an offering for sin." And, (ver. 12.) " He bare the sins of many." And, (Dan. ix. 26.) it is said, " the Messias should be cut off, but not for himself."

It was foretold that his hands and feet should be pierced, (Psal. xxii. 16.) He should be " numbered with the transgressors," (Isa. liii. 12.) And accordingly he was condemned as a malefactor, to suffer with malefactors, " being crucified between two thieves."

It was foretold that he should have " gall and vinegar given him to drink," (Psal. lxix. 21.) that he should be derided in the midst of his sufferings, (Psal. xxii. 7, 8.) " All they that see me, laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord, that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." And this was most punctually accomplished, (Matt. xxvii. 39. 43.) " And they that passed by, reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him."

It was foretold that he should cry out under his sufferings, (Psal. xxii. 1.) " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" That he should pray for his wicked persecutors, (Isa. liii. 12.) that " he made intercession for the transgressors:" and so he did most affectionately, " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That they should cast lots for his garment, (Psal. xxii. 18.) All, or most of which predictions, were by the ancient Jews, understood of the Messias, and were exactly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, as appears fully out of the history of the gospel.

And then for the circumstances of his burial.

It was foretold, that he should " make his grave with the rich," (Isa. liii. 9.) which was accomplished, in that he was put into Joseph of Arimathea's own tomb.

His resurrection was foretold to be " after three days," (Hos. vi. 2.) as several of the rabbies understood that place; however, that he should rise again, may be plainly urged from these texts, where it is said " that his kingdom should have no end;" and (Isa. liii. 10.) where it is said, that, after his death, " He shall see his seed, and prolong his days; and that the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." But most expressly, (Psal. xvi. 10.) " Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

And his " sitting at the right hand of God," which supposeth his ascension into heaven, (Psal. cx. 1.) " Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

The wonderful success of the gospel, and the universal spreading of it through the world, was foretold, Gen. xii. 3. " In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;" which implies, that the blessing of the gospel, which the Messias brought to the world, should be universally diffused. (Gen. xlix. 10.) " To him shall the gathering of the people be." (Psal. ii. 8.) God promiseth there to give Christ " the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession." Besides several other places of the Psalms and prophets, too many to be reckoned up.

Now the accomplishment of all these prophecies happened in their days who saw our Saviour, and conversed with him; so that they were capable of receiving full satisfaction concerning his Divine au-

thority, and that he was a person sent of God to teach the world, and assure them that he was the Messias, foretold and prophesied of in the books of the Old Testament, which being by them received as of Divine inspiration, did consequently assure them that he was from God.

II. The second way whereby we may be satisfied concerning the Divine authority of a person, is by the testimony of an immediate voice from heaven; and this testimony Christ had twice given to him: the first publicly before a great assembly of people at John's baptism, which was just before he began his public ministry, (Matt. iii. 16, 17.) "The Holy Ghost descending upon him like a dove, as he came out of the water; and there was a voice from heaven, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." The same voice was heard by Peter, James, and John, at his transfiguration on the mount, as you may see, Luke ix. 35. And this St. Peter mentions, as a considerable argument of Christ's Divine authority, (2 Pet. i. 16—18.) "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount."

Indeed he makes this testimony to be such an argument, as, concurring with that which I mentioned before, is sufficient to persuade one that Christ was sent from God; but he does not make it to be equal to that which he adds at the 19th verse: "We have

also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto you do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place," &c. Intimating, the prophecies of the Old Testament were greater confirmation, than this single testimony of a voice from heaven does amount to.

III. I proceed to the next evidence, which those who lived in our Saviour's time had of his Divine authority, viz. the power of working miracles, which he was endowed withal; and this is the highest testimony that can be given to any person, that he is sent from God. And in this respect chiefly is the gospel called "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ," because of those glorious miracles whereby the gospel was confirmed. This is, as it were, the broad seal of heaven, which is sufficient to give confirmation to any doctrine which does not evidently contradict the perfections of the Divine nature: and it is not credible, that the providence of God is so little tender of the concernments of mankind, as to communicate this power to any person that will abuse it to the confirmation of a lie. I deny not but the devil may do many strange things, and such as we cannot distinguish from some sort of miracles;* and where men, by some great precedent provocation, have made it just for God "to give them up to strong delusions to believe lies, because they would not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness;" there God may permit the devil to work strange wonders, as it is foretold, (2 Thess. ii. 9.) that the coming of antichrist "shall be after the working of Satan, with all power and signs, and lying wonders, and all deceiveableness of unrighte-

* Of this see more, Sermon CCXXVIII. &c. p. 348. of this volume.

ousness." But in this case, there will remain two ways, whereby impartial and considerate men, and such as are not blinded by prejudice or their lusts, may sufficiently discover that this is not from God.

1. By the absurdity of the doctrine which those wonders are brought to confirm: and such were the lewd, and filthy, and senseless doctrines of the gnostics, to which Simon Magus pretended to give a confirmation by the wonders that he wrought, and this, very probably, may be that which the apostle refers to in this chapter. And such, likewise, are several of the doctrines of popery: such as the adoration of the Virgin Mary, of saints and images, and the doctrine of transubstantiation; for the confirmation of which, they pretend a great many wonders have been wrought.

2. By the contrariety of the doctrine to that which hath had the confirmation of far greater miracles. Therefore, if we should grant to the papists, that several of those miracles which they brag of were really wrought, (which, considering the infinite cheats and impostures which have been practised by them in that kind, and have been discovered, we have no reason to grant;) yet, because the doctrine, which they pretend to confirm, is absurd and unreasonable, and contrary to the doctrine which they themselves own to have had a far greater confirmation, by miracles far greater, and more unquestionable, more publicly done, and in such a manner, and with such circumstances, as do free them from all suspicion of imposture; I say, for this reason, we cannot admit those doctrines to be of Divine authority; because the confirmation which is given to them by those wonders, is overpowered by a

greater and more Divine testimony; as the magicians of Pharaoh, though they did many odd feats, yet were plainly mastered and conquered by the greater miracles which Moses wrought.

The sum is this: That wherever any person is endowed with an eminent power of working miracles, such as are of the first rank, great and unquestionable, and many and publicly wrought, this is one of the highest evidences we can have of the Divine authority of any person or doctrine. Therefore Nicodemus does upon this ground very reasonably conclude, that our Saviour was sent from God, (John iii. 2.) "We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do those miracles which thou doest, except God be with him." And our Saviour himself insists upon this frequently, as the great proof of his Divine authority, (Matt. xi. 3, 4.) When John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to him, to be satisfied whether he was the Messias, he bids them report to John what the doctrine was which they heard him preach, and what miracles they saw him work for the confirmation of it: "Go and shew John those things which you do see and hear; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, and the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them." John v. 33, 36. our Saviour there tells the Jews, that "John bare witness of him;" and that might satisfy them, because they looked upon John as a prophet: "But (saith he) I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." (John xv. 24.) "If I had not done among them the works which no other man did,

they had not had sin." This was the great aggravation of their unbelief, that they resisted the evidence of so great miracles, such as no man in the world ever wrought.*

I should now briefly run over the chief of those miracles of our Saviour, which we find recorded in the history of the gospel; and shew, that they have all the advantages that miracles can have, to give satisfaction to men concerning their reality. But this I reserve for my next discourse.

* See more of this, Sermon CCXXI. p. 225. of this volume.

SERMON CCXXXV.

THE EVIDENCES OF THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.—2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

In my last discourse, I was considering the third evidence which those who lived in our Saviour's time had of his Divine authority, viz. The power of working miracles, with which he was endowed. And in treating on this, I proposed briefly to run over the chief of those miracles of our Saviour, which we find recorded in the gospel, and to shew that they have all the advantages that miracles can have, to give satisfaction to men concerning their reality. And that I may proceed in some kind of order and method, I shall reduce the miracles that concern our Saviour to these three heads:

First, The miracles of his life.

Secondly, Those that were wrought at his death.

Thirdly, The great miracles of his resurrection from the dead, and those two that were consequent upon it, his ascension into heaven, and his sending the Holy Ghost upon the apostles and Christians in miraculous gifts and powers.

I begin with the first, the miracles of his life. And, in speaking of these, I shall shew, that they had all the advantageous circumstances to convince

men of the reality of them, and to free them from all suspicion of imposture. They were many; they were great and unquestionable miracles; they were frequently wrought, and for a long time together; publicly, and in the presence of multitudes; and they were beneficial, and for the good of men.

1. They were many. There might be something of imposture suspected in a few instances, that might be chosen out for the purpose. But our Saviour gave instances of his Divine power in several kinds; so that there is scarce any thing that is miraculous can be instanced in, wherein he did not shew his power. He healed all manner of diseases, and that in multitudes of people, as they came accidentally, without any discrimination; (Matt. iv. 23, 24.) And though most of his miracles were healing, yet he gave instances in other kinds; as in turning of water into wine, commanding down the storm, and walking upon the waters, &c. And though the history of the gospel mentions very many miracles that he wrought, yet St. John tells us, that those that are recorded are but very few in comparison of what he did; (John xx. 30.) "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book." And, (chap. xxi. 35.) "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." An hyperbolical expression, to signify the great number of his miracles and actions, besides what are recorded by the evangelists.

2. As they were many, so they were great and unquestionable, both as to the manner of doing them, and as to the things that he did.

(1.) Many things which were not miraculous in themselves, yet were so as to the manner of doing them, which was not by any magical words, and figures, and charms, and superstitious rites, according to the manner of those who pretended to work miracles among the heathens. It is true, he healed many diseases which were curable by physic and art: yet then the manner was such as was above the ordinary course of nature; many he cured by a word only, or by a touch, and the cure was wrought immediately, and in the same instant when he spake the word, though they were at a great distance. Many were cured without his taking any notice of them, by touching the very hem of his garment, of all which I might give several instances, but that they are so well known to those who are acquainted with the history of the gospel. Sometimes, indeed, he performed the cure by degrees; as in the man that was restored to sight, and saw men at first confusedly, and without any distinction, as if they had been trees; (Mark viii. 24.) Sometimes he used some kind of means, but such as were very disproportionable in their nature to the effect that was produced; as in the case of the deaf man, which he cured by putting his finger into his ear, and by his spittle; (Mark vii. 33.) and the blind man, whose eyes he anointed with clay mixed with spittle, and sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam; (John ix. 6, 7.) but most of his miracles he wrought in an instant, and merely by his word.

(2.) As to the things he did, many of them were miraculous in themselves. He cured many inveterate diseases; (Matt. ix. 20.) a woman that had an issue of blood twelve years. He made the woman straight, by touching her, that had been crooked and bowed together eighteen years; (Luke xiii. 13.) and

the man that had an infirmity thirty-eight years, only by bidding him take up his bed and walk; (John v. 8.) He cured the man that was born blind; (John ix.) And, which all men will grant to be miraculous, and to have exceeded all the power of nature that we know of, he raised several from the dead; and because it might be said that several of those were not really dead, but in a delirium or swoon, there is one instance beyond all exception; (John ix.) he raised up Lazarus to life, after he had been four days in the grave.

3. He wrought his miracles frequently, upon all occasions that were offered, and for a long time together, during the whole time of his public ministry, which is generally computed to have been three years and a half; a time sufficient to have detected any impostor in; especially one that shewed himself so openly, and conversed indifferently with all sorts of persons with so little guard and caution.

4. He did all his miracles publicly, not in corners and among some select company of people, but before multitudes, and in the greatest places of concourse; so that if there had been any thing of imposture in them, he gave the fairest opportunity that could be to his enemies to have detected him. Mahomet's miracles were wrought by himself alone, without witness, which was the best way in the world, certainly, for one that could work no miracles, but yet could persuade the people what he pleased: but our Saviour did nothing in private. His transfiguration only was before three of his disciples; and therefore, he made no use of that as an argument to the Jews, but charged his disciples to tell it to none, till after his resurrection, because that would give credit to it; after they were as-

sured of that, they would easily believe his transfiguration; but all his other miracles were in the sight of the people. He healed publicly, and admitted all to see what he did. When he turned the water into wine, it was at a public feast; when he multiplied the loaves and the fishes, it was in the sight of four or five thousand people; when he raised Lazarus from the dead, it was before a great multitude of the people. The works that he did durst abide the light, and the more they were manifested, the more miraculous they did appear.

5. His miracles were generally beneficial, and for the good of men; so that they had these two characters of Divinity stamped upon them—that they were effects both of power and goodness. Most of his miracles were such as tended to the benefit of mankind; most of them were either healing or feeding miracles; or refreshing, as turning the water into wine; or tending to the peace of human society, as the miracle that he wrought rather than he would give offence by not paying tribute. It is true, indeed, he might have shewn his power every way; he gave some instances of it in other kinds, which might seem more for his purpose, and for the manifestation of his power, as in his allaying the storm, and walking upon the water: but he wrought no miracles that were destructive, except only two; namely, his permitting the devil to enter into the swine, (Matt. viii. 28.) whereby the inhabitants of the place sustained a great loss. But our Saviour did this upon very good reason, as a reproof of that sordid temper which he saw to be in them; they were so immersed in the world, and wedded to their interests, that they would, rather than lose any thing in that kind, forfeit all the

blessings that the Messias brought with him; and this temper appeared afterwards in them; for though they were convinced that he had wrought a miracle, yet, because they had sustained some prejudice, they desired him to depart out of their coast.

The other exception is his cursing the fig-tree; (Matt. xxi. 19.) which had a moral signification to his disciples, and was a sharp warning to them, what they must look for if they were unfruitful. Our Saviour rebukes our sloth and barrenness in the fig-tree.

Secondly, Next to the miracles of our Saviour's life, I mentioned those that were wrought at his death, which, though they were not wrought by him, yet they were wrought to give testimony to him, that he was some extraordinary person; forasmuch as when he died the frame of nature was put into such a trembling and melancholy posture; so the history of the gospel tells us, (Matt. xxvii. 45.) that "from the sixth hour till the ninth, there was darkness over all the land;" which, as learned men have calculated, could not be an eclipse, according to the natural course of things. And, (ver. 51, 52, &c.) "The veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened."

Thirdly, The great miracle which was wrought after his death, in raising him up from the dead, together with those two that were consequent upon it, his visible ascending into heaven, and his sending the Holy Ghost upon the apostles and primitive Christians, in such miraculous gifts and powers.

First, The great miracle of his resurrection, after he had lain three days in the grave. This was the miracle which was to be the chief attestation of his

Divine authority, and to give confirmation to the doctrine which he declared to the world. And accordingly we find that the chief office of the apostles was to be witnesses of his resurrection; and the great evidence they were to give to the world of his Divine authority was, that "God raised him from the dead." And we find the Scripture every where laying the great stress of his Divine authority upon this miracle: (Acts xvii. 31.) "By that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Rom. i. 4.) "Declared mightily to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead." (1 Pet. i. 21.) "Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory."

Now that this miracle was really wrought, I shall endeavour to shew, by producing such evidence for it, as the nature of the thing to be proved (which is matter of fact) will bear. I shall, therefore,

First, Produce such testimony as we have for it.

Secondly, Add some considerations that may serve to give strength and advantage to the testimony.

First, For the testimony we have of this. In short, we have it attested by an abundantly sufficient number of eye-witnesses; and greater evidence than this, matter of fact is not capable of. For the eye-witnesses and the number of them, you have them produced by St. Paul, (1 Cor. xv. 5—8.) The sum of what he saith is this;—that Christ, after his resurrection, was seen once by Peter alone, once by James alone, and twice by all the apostles together, and by above five hundred brethren at once. So that the number of the eye-witnesses is abundantly sufficient. And that they did attest this, appears by the history of the gospel, which hath descended

down to us by uncontrolled tradition. And in this case we require no more credit to be given to the gospel, than to any other history or narrative of matter of fact; which whosoever doth deny takes away the faith of history, and makes it impossible to prove the truth of any thing that is past.*

Secondly, I shall add some considerations that may serve to give strength and advantage to this testimony; partly relating to the persons that give this testimony, and partly to the matter or thing which they attest.

1. In reference to the persons that gave this testimony, we may consider them with these three advantages:

(1.) That they are credible persons.

(2.) That they agree in their testimony.

(3.) That the greatest sufferings could not make them conceal it or deny it.

(1.) For the credibility of the persons. Two things render a witness suspected—want of knowledge, or of integrity; if either he do not sufficiently know the thing which he attests; or there be reason to suspect his fidelity in relating the thing. Now the witnesses in this case of the resurrection cannot be questioned for either of these; not for want of knowledge, because they were eye-witnesses, as I said before: nor for want of faithfulness. There are two things which ordinarily make us suspect the fidelity of a witness; if there be either an appearance of deceit in the manner of the relation, or of design in the end of it: but the witnesses of Christ's resurrection are free from both these grounds of jealousy.

1. There is no appearance of deceit in the manner

* Of this see more, Sermon CXCII. vol. viii. p. 308

of their relating it. We suspect a relation that is either too general, or too artificial; but the report of these witnesses cannot be charged with either of these. For,

(1.) They report the thing with all its circumstances of time and place; when he rose, what were the circumstances of it, where he was seen, and by whom, how often he appeared, what he did and said.

(2.) They use no art or insinuation in the manner of delivering, but report it with the greatest plainness, and nakedness, and simplicity, that can be imagined; without any ambiguity, or obscurity, or flourish of language, as becomes an honest relator, who useth no arts, because he is not guilty to himself of any design to deceive.

2. Nor is there any appearance of design as to the end of their testimony. What design could they have, who did knowingly renounce all secular advantages of honour, and riches, and reputation, and forego all worldly contentment, and expose themselves to continual hazards and sufferings? They got nothing by bearing this testimony, but what every man that hath worldly designs doth most solicitously avoid.

(2dly.) They concur and agree in their testimony. They constantly delivered the same testimony, with all its circumstances, both in word and writing, several persons in several places, without varying or disagreeing in the least material circumstance.

(3dly.) The greatest sufferings could not make them either deny it or conceal it; which is a great argument of their integrity. If the thing they attested had been false, it had been an unparalleled madness for any one to persist in it to the loss of life; and incredible, that so many should conspire in

the same unreasonable and unaccountable folly; especially when the religion which they professed, did exclude all liars from all the happiness and rewards of the next life, which they pretended to be persuaded of; so that whatsoever those persons might be otherwise, and however they might falsify in other things, there is no reason to doubt of their truth and fidelity in this report, because they died for the testimony of it. Therefore the highest attestation of a thing is called martyrdom, and the most credible witnesses, martyrs. And though bare martyrdom be not an argument of the infallible truth of a testimony, or of the infallibility of the person that gives it; yet it is one of the highest arguments that can be of his honesty and integrity in that thing, and that he believes himself; otherwise he would not die for it: and it is a good evidence of the general integrity of these persons, as to all other things, that they were so conscientious, as not, for fear of death, to deny that which they believed to be a truth, nor to conceal that which they believed to be of importance.

II. As to the matter or thing which they attested, we may consider it with these advantages:

1. The resurrection of Christ was such a thing, as in its own nature they were capable of giving evidence to.

2. We will consider a little the circumstances of it, which add much to the credit of it.

3. We will consider the effects that this relation and report had in the world.

4. The circumstances of the persons who entertained the belief of it.

1. Let us consider that the resurrection of Christ is such a thing, as in the nature of it they were capable of giving testimony to. Indeed, if it were

such a thing, as either in the nature of it were absolutely impossible, as if a man should say he had seen or handled a pure spirit; or else such, as these persons could not reasonably be presumed to be competent witnesses of it, as if a man that is altogether ignorant in geometry should say, that he had seen such a man demonstrate a proposition in Euclid; in these cases, though a man be ever so credible, yet he is not to be credited. But the resurrection of Christ is no such thing; no man that believes that God can make a living body out of nothing, can think it absolutely impossible to raise a dead body to life: nor was it a thing they could not be presumed competent witnesses of: for that which they attest concerning the resurrection of Christ, is that which every man may give evidence in, for it requires nothing but common sense and understanding; as to touch and handle a body, and know that it is a body; to see a man perform the operations of life, to see him walk, and eat, and hear him speak: and this they attest of Christ, after he was crucified, dead, and buried; that they saw him several times, and conversed with him; and they could not be mistaken in the person, being so intimately and familiarly acquainted with him in his life-time.

2. We will consider a little the circumstances of his resurrection. He had foretold in his life-time, that he would rise again the third day. The chief priests and the pharisees remembered this saying, and therefore, lest his disciples should come by night and steal him away, they make the sepulchre sure, seal the stone, and set a guard of soldiers. The disciples, whom they were afraid of, they were scattered with fear; and that it might appear that it was the work of God, there was a great earthquake,

which made the guard to tremble; and in their sight an angel, appearing in a most glorious manner, rolled away the stone; and when he was risen, and appeared to his disciples, they were terrified, and thought it had been a spirit, until our Saviour bids them see him, and handle him, that he had flesh and bones, which a spirit could not have. He conversed familiarly with them; and for their greater satisfaction did eat with them; and to satisfy the scrupulous unbelief of Thomas, he bid him put his hand into the hole of his side, and see in his hands the print of the nails, to shew that it was the same body that was crucified. Now the greater their jealousy and unbelief were, the greater is the evidence of the thing; and it shews that it was upon great conviction, and when they could no longer resist the evidence of the thing, that they did believe it: and after all this, they saw him ascend up into heaven, and found the promise of the Spirit made good to them, to furnish them with power and gifts for carrying on the work of the gospel.

3. We will consider the strange and wonderful effects that this report and relation had in the world. The preaching of Christ crucified, and rising from the dead, had a strange operation upon the world. With such admirable success did this prevail, that in a few years the gospel was entertained in a great part of the world. The plain and naked relation of this, by men that were destitute of secular learning and arts, without the help of power, or policy, or any other worldly advantage, did prevail with men to entertain and embrace that profession, against the prejudice of education, the bias of corrupt nature, and the advantages of worldly interests: nor could all the opposition of the great and the

wise, the princes and the philosophers of the world, give a check to the prevalency of it. Surely nothing but Truth could have wrought those great wonders and effects, naked and unarmed. Those strange and miraculous effects which are matter of fact, and undeniable, one would think should render it very easy to any man to believe the miracle of Christ's resurrection.

4. We will consider the circumstances of the persons who entertained the belief of it. Many of them were very rational, and serious, and inquisitive persons, who had opportunity to satisfy themselves about the truth of it; and if there had been any reason to disbelieve the testimony that was given, had such great and generous spirits, that if it had been for their advantage and interest to have believed it, yet out of the greatness of their minds they would not have entertained any ungrounded relation, much less a religion built upon it. Such were some, eminent among the Jews and heathens for their great learning, and knowledge of philosophy, and all excellent endowments, who were early converted to Christianity. And as for the multitude who embraced the gospel, the doctrine of it was so contrary to their lusts, and the profession of it to their interests, that nothing can be imagined to have persuaded them to the belief of it, but a high satisfaction of the truth of it; and particularly of this great miracle of Christ's resurrection, upon which principally the gospel doth rely. And thus I have endeavoured to give you the best evidence I could of the truth of this miracle.

I should now proceed to take notice of the objections that may be made against it: but this I shall reserve to the following discourse.

SERMON CCXXXVI.

THE EVIDENCES OF THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.—2 COR. iv. 3, 4.

I HAVE been considering the evidence which those who lived in our Saviour's time had of his Divine authority, from the power of working miracles, with which he was endowed.

The miracles which concern our Saviour, I reduced to three heads—those of his life; those wrought at his death; and the great miracle of his resurrection from the dead, together with those two that were consequent upon it—his visible ascension into heaven, and his sending the Holy Ghost.

As to the resurrection of our Saviour, I have produced the testimonies for it, and have added some considerations that may give strength and advantage to that testimony; and shall now proceed to take notice of the most considerable exceptions that may be made against it. And all the exceptions that can be brought against it, that are of any moment, and that I know of, are these three—that tradition of the Jews, that he was stolen out of the grave; or that he was not really dead; or that his appearance was an illusion from evil spirits. The

first of these is ancient, and was the invention of the Jews, and denies the integrity of the witnesses of his resurrection, making them deceivers: the two last suppose the fidelity of the witnesses, but say, they were deceived, either as to his death, or as to his appearance afterward: and these have been since invented by atheistical spirits. I shall briefly answer them, and, first, in general, I say these two things:

1. That they who deny this, have this disadvantage, that they are to prove a negative, which is never capable of that evidence, which an affirmation is.

2. These exceptions look very like envy, for they do not concur to make up one strong objection against the testimony of Christ's resurrection; but each of them contradicts the other, and is inconsistent with them: for if the tradition of the Jews be true, that he was stolen out of his grave after he was dead and buried, and that the story of his appearing to them was a forgery, then the two latter exceptions are false, and so of the rest; so that these exceptions look very like the false witnesses that were suborned against Christ, that "they do not agree together." But to the objections themselves I answer,

First, The tradition of the Jews; that his body was stolen out of the sepulchre, and all that which is related afterwards, of his appearing to his disciples and conversing with them, and ascending into heaven, was a forgery and imposture.

Answer.—We have early notice given of this in the history of the gospel, (Matt. xxviii. 11.) that when the chief priests heard that his body was gone out of the grave, they consulted together, and

hired the soldiers to say that the disciples came by night, and, whilst they were asleep, stole him away. Observe what it was that the soldiers were to testify, that, whilst they were asleep, the disciples came and stole away his body. Very credible persons, that were to give testimony of what they saw done whilst they were asleep! A man had need be hired with a great sum to give such a testimony, so ridiculous; and it seems the pharisees looked upon the governor as very simple, that would be so easily persuaded of so unlikely a thing.

2. It should seem it was not believed by themselves; for Josephus, a knowing and learned man of that nation and religion, who lived immediately after that time, speaks positively in the 18th book of his Antiquities, that "Christ was crucified, and appeared to his disciples the third day, rising from the dead;" and he speaks not a word of the forgery, which had been much for the credit of his nation and religion.

3. If we compare the fidelity of the persons on both sides; the witnesses of Christ's resurrection cannot be suspected of any worldly interest or design; but the priests and pharisees were concerned both in reputation and interest, to blast this miracle as much as they could; because, if it should be entertained, both their religion would be endangered, and they would be looked upon as murderers of him whose holiness and innocency were attested by such a miracle.

4. If this exception had been true, it had been easy to have discovered the imposture, and undeceived the people: the gospel would have fallen and sunk in a short time. Nothing but truth could have borne up and prevailed against so much op-

position. If this had been the work of men, and an imposture, it "would have come to nought;" but it was truth, and of God, and therefore it "could not be overthrown."

Secondly, That he was not dead when he was put into the grave, that he was but in a swoon or deliquium, and so might rise again without a miracle.

Answ. 1.—We may reasonably suppose, that the malice of the Jews took care to kill him. Besides, the circumstances of the story do sufficiently evidence it. Upon the piercing of his side, "water and blood came out;" which was an evidence that his heart was pierced. And after his body was exhausted of its blood, there could be no return to life again. But it seems the soldiers were satisfied in the thing, who, when they came to break his bones, spared him, "because they found he was already dead."

2. If he was not dead yet, how could he rise again? It was a pitiful securing of the grave, and a little great stone that was rolled upon it, if a weak and wounded, and spent man, after so much pain, and the expense of so much blood, could roll it away!

3. Suppose he did rise, what became of him afterwards? How came we to have no particulars of what became of him? If those which the story gives us be true, that after forty days he was taken up into heaven, we need not doubt of his resurrection, for this is as miraculous as that.

Thirdly, The third and last exception is as unreasonable as any, which grants that he did seem to appear to his disciples, but they were imposed upon by the illusion of evil spirits.

Answ. 1.—That which may be an evasion in any

case, is to be admitted in no case. This exception supposeth as much evidence for his resurrection, as this or any other thing is capable of; and yet would make it an illusion: but this denies all certainty; for if we may be deceived when we have the greatest assurance of a thing that our senses can give us, then we may not only question the resurrection of Christ, but every thing else.

2. If we believe the providence of God, we cannot think it to be so little vigilant, as that honest and well-meaning persons should be continually exposed to the insolence and cheats of evil spirits, and in a matter of the greatest concernment should be ever liable to be deceived, and cannot help it.

Having thus considered our Saviour's resurrection, and answered the objections against it, I proceed to those two miracles which followed his resurrection; namely, his ascension into heaven, and his sending the Holy Ghost upon the apostles and primitive Christians in such miraculous powers and gifts.

First, His ascension into heaven. And of this the disciples of our Saviour were also eye-witnesses. So St. Luke tells us, (Acts i. 4. 9.) "And when they were assembled together," and Christ among them after his resurrection, and when he had given them in charge what he would have them do, "as they looked on, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." What more visible demonstration could there be, that this man was sent of God, than that, after he had preached the doctrine which he came to deliver to the world and confirmed it by so many miracles, and God had given so great an attestation to him, by raising him up from the dead; I say, what more visible demonstra-

tion that he came from God, than to see him taken up into heaven, after he had finished the work for which God sent him into the world?

Secondly, The sending of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles and primitive Christians in such miraculous powers and gifts, whereby they were enabled to speak divers languages, in order to the more expedite publishing of the gospel to the world, to heal diseases, and to raise the dead, to foretell things to come, and (which was common with the apostles and all Christians for some ages) they had a power of casting out devils, by adjuring them in the name of Christ. Now what could be a clearer evidence that he came from God, and was returned to him, than the conferring of such miraculous powers and gifts upon men, after he was ascended into heaven, as a testimony that he was invested in his royalty, having a power conferred upon him to dispense those gifts to men?

But of the ascension* of our Saviour, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, having upon other occasions discoursed at large, I shall need to add no more here; only, before I conclude this head, I shall briefly mention the chief of those objections, which these miracles which were wrought by our Saviour, and on his behalf, are liable to, and endeavour to return a satisfactory answer to them. And there are two objections against his miracles in general.

First, That he wrought them by the power of the devil.

* See Sermons CXCV. CXCVI. CXCVII. CXCVIII. vol. viii. p. 359, &c. and CCXXVIII. CCXXIX. CCXXX. p. 347, &c. of the present volume.

Secondly, The other objection is taken from that expression of the evangelist, (Matt. xiii. 58.) where it is said, that when Jesus was in his own country, "he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief;" which saying is perversely abused by some, as if it signified, that the credulity, and strong imagination of the people, were a great ingredient into his miracles.

First, That he wrought them by the power of the devil. This was the objection which the Jews of old made against our Saviour, (Matt. xii. 24.) that he "cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils," who had power and authority over the rest, and consequently to cast out those that were subject to him; and the Jews at this day make the same objection against all his miracles. Celsus did the same.

To this I cannot render a better answer than our Saviour himself did, when this objection was first started, which was twofold:

1. That it was very unlikely that the devil should contribute to the ruin and overthrow of his own kingdom. (Matt. xii. 25, 26.) "Every kingdom divided against itself, is brought to desolation: and every city or house divided against itself, shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself: how then shall his kingdom stand?" The force of which argument is this: that it cannot be imagined, that he who preacheth a doctrine so contrary to the design which the devil carried on in the world, and so destructive to his kingdom, as our Saviour did, should be assisted by him to confirm the doctrine by any miraculous effects; especially such as did so directly tend to the overthrow of his own kingdom, and to dispossess him

of the advantage of tyrannizing over men, which he was so desirous to get and hold.

But, 2. He tells them, that, by the same reason that they attributed those miracles of his to the devil, all miracles that ever were wrought in the world, might be attributed to him. Did it appear by the tendency of his doctrine, or the course and design of his life and actions, or by any magical rites that he used, that he had any familiarity with the devil; or carried on any design for him? What colour of reason then was there to ascribe the miracles that he wrought to the devil, any more than the miracles that Moses had wrought; or any more than those dispossessions which were wrought by the children of their own nation, in the name of the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob? (ver. 27.) "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore, they shall be your judges." Several among yourselves do, or at least pretend to cast out devils, by the power of God, and you believe they do so; why should you not think that I do it by the same power? what reason have you to suspect me of correspondence with the devil more than them? No answer could have been more satisfactory in itself, and more opposite to those that made the objection.

The second objection is grounded upon a spiteful and malicious perverting of those words of the evangelist, (Matt. xiii. 58.) where it is said, that Jesus, when he was in his own country, "did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." From whence some atheistical persons, as Cæsar Vaninus, and a wretched man of our own nation, who, I suppose, stole it out of him, have collected, that credulity and strong imagination in the people,

were the principal ingredients in our Saviour's miracles; and where he did not meet with persons so disposed, he could do no great matter.

This objection deserves rather to be abhorred and detested as a groundless and malicious insinuation, than to be answered; but because it seems to have some colour as well as spite in it, I shall briefly return an answer to it, and that by giving a plain account of this passage in the evangelist; and that is this: our Saviour comes to Nazareth, the place where he had been born, and he began to instruct them in his doctrine, and, as he used to do wherever he came, he wrought some miracles for the confirmation of his doctrine; but they, upon an unreasonable prejudice taken up against him, because they had known the meanness of his parents, and of his education, despised both his doctrine and his miracles. Our Saviour, perceiving that upon this prejudice they rejected the evidence of his miracles, the highest attestation that God can give, saw that there was no good to be done upon them; and therefore, leaving them to their own obstinacy and unreasonable unbelief, he forbore to do any more great works among them: for the text doth not say that he did no mighty works among them, because of their unbelief; but that he did not many mighty works among them; that is, finding them possessed with this unreasonable prejudice against him, he found they were not to be convinced by any miracle that he could work, and therefore, though he had done some mighty works among them, yet he forbore to do any more, as a just judgment upon them for their obstinacy and unbelief. And that this is the plain meaning of it, there needs no more to convince any man, but to read

over this passage of the evangelist, (Matt. xiii. 54—58.) "And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." And now judge, how little reason there is from these words, for any such foolish and malicious objection.

I might add farther, if it were necessary, that many of his miracles were such, as no credulity or strength of imagination could assist to the working of them; as I could make evident from very many instances, particularly that of raising Lazarus, after he had lain four days in the grave. But enough of this.

Now to reflect upon this evidence of Christ's Divine authority from the miracles which he did, and which were wrought to give testimony to him. What greater satisfaction can any one be imagined to have concerning any person, that he is sent from God, than the apostles had, and the rest of those who conversed with our Saviour, and saw the miracles that were wrought by him, and on his behalf? Suppose we had lived in our Saviour's time and had conversed with him, what greater evidence could we have desired of his Divine authority, than to have seen with our eyes so many strange things done

by him, exceeding any natural power that we know of, and things so beneficial to mankind; and all these wrought so frequently, and so openly? To have seen this person put to death, and at that instant the whole frame of nature disordered and put out of its course? To have seen this person, after he had lain three days in the grave, raised to life again; and to have the greatest assurance of this that our senses can give us of any thing: by frequent and familiar conversation; by discoursing with him; by eating and drinking with him; by touching and handling of his body: and afterwards to have seen this same person visibly taken up into heaven; and, according as he had promised before he left the world, to have found ourselves afterwards endowed with a miraculous power of speaking all on the sudden all sorts of languages; of healing diseases; of foretelling things to come; of casting out devils; of raising the dead: had we seen all this with our eyes and experienced this strange power in ourselves; could there have remained any doubt in us, but that this person was sent from God, and specially commissioned from heaven, to declare the mind of God to the world?

If, after all this, any man will say, that so many persons as were eye-witnesses of these things, might be deceived in a plain sensible matter; I would desire that man to prove to me that he is waking, or to evidence to me by better arguments, any thing else that he thinks himself most certain of.

IV. The fourth evidence which those who lived in our Saviour's time had of his Divine authority, was the spirit of prophecy proved to be in him, and made good by the accomplishment of his own predictions. This also was a clear testimony that he

was from God ; for God challengeth this as peculiar to the Deity, to foretell future contingents. (Isa. xli. 23.) " Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." The oracles of the heathen did give out some dark and doubtful conjectures about future things; but a clear and certain prediction of things was always looked upon as an argument, that the person that could do it was inspired from God; and therefore the spirit of prophecy which was in our Saviour, and by him conferred upon the apostles afterward, hath always been justly looked upon as a good testimony that he was from God. So the angel tells St. John, (Rev. xix. 10.) that " the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Now the predictions of our Saviour were many; and those very plain, and punctual, and particular; and such as all, or most of them, had their accomplishment in that age. That we may take a more distinct view of them, I shall reduce them to these five heads :

1. Those that foretold his death, and the circumstances of it.

2. His resurrection, and the particular circumstances of that.

3. The descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles, with the circumstances belonging to that.

4. The destruction of Jerusalem before the end of that age, with the signs foregoing it, and the concomitant circumstances of that.

5. Those that foretold the fate of the gospel in the world, the opposition it should meet with, and yet the admirable success it should have, notwithstanding that opposition.

1. Those that foretell his death, and the circum-

stances of it. This he did very particularly, and at several times; (Matt. xvi. 21.) he told his disciples, "That he must go unto Jerusalem, and there suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed." Mark x. 33, 34. and Matt. xx. 18, 19. he foretells more particularly the manner of their proceedings against him, that "the chief priests and scribes should condemn him to death;" but that they should not put him to death, but "deliver him to the gentiles, to mock, and scourge, and crucify him," which was afterwards done by Pilate, the Roman governor. He foretold likewise the manner how this should be brought about, (Matt. xx. 18.) that he should be "betrayed into the hands of men." And he did particularly point out beforehand the man that was to betray him, (Matt. xxvi. 23.) "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me." He foretold that his disciples should forsake him, (Matt. xxvi. 31.) "All of you shall be offended because of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." And when Peter declared his confident resolution to stick to him, he foretold that he should deny him, with very particular circumstances of the time and manner of it; (Mark xiv. 30.) "This night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice:" which was all punctually accomplished.

2. He punctually foretold his resurrection, with the circumstances of it, that "he should rise again the third day," (Matt. xvi. 21.) and that "after he was risen, he would go before them into Galilee," (Matt. xxvi. 32.) which was accomplished. (Matt. xxxviii. 16.)

3. He foretold likewise the descent of the Holy

Ghost upon the apostles in miraculous powers and gifts; (Luke xxiv. 49.) "Behold I send the promise of my Father upon you, but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endowed with power from on high." He specifies the place where the Holy Ghost should descend; and what the effects of this descent of the Holy Ghost upon them should be; he tells them particularly; (Mark xvi. 17, 18.) "And these signs shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out devils, and they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." All which was punctually fulfilled in the second of the Acts, and the following part of that history.

There are yet two other instances of our Saviour's prophetical spirit, which I mentioned; but those I reserve to the next discourse.

SERMON CCXXXVII.

THE EVIDENCES OF THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.—2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

I am considering the fourth evidence which those who lived in our Saviour's time had of his Divine authority, viz. the spirit of prophecy, proved to be in him, and made good by the accomplishment of his predictions. I gave five instances of our Saviour's predictions.

1. Those which foretold his death, and its circumstances.

2. Those which foretold his resurrection, and its circumstances.

3. Those which foretold the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles, with the circumstances thereof.

These three I have considered, and now proceed to the two which remain:

4. The next instance therefore of our Saviour's prophetical spirit, is his foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, with the circumstances of it. Now because this is one of the greatest instances of our Saviour's prophetical spirit, and so particular a prediction, so punctually answered by the event,

therefore I shall insist the longer upon it; especially because I look upon it as one of the most convincing arguments that can be brought against the Jews for the truth of our religion.

And in order to our clearer proceeding in this matter that I am speaking to, I shall do these three things:

First, Explain the series and order of this prediction of our Saviour's concerning the destruction of Jerusalem.

Secondly, Expound the particulars of it, as we find them in Matt. xxiv. compared with the other two evangelists that wrote of it, St. Mark and St. Luke.

Thirdly, Make some reflections upon this prediction, and the punctual accomplishment of it; from which it may appear of what force this argument is for the conviction of the Jews of the truth of our religion.

First, I shall explain the series and order of this prediction concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. And this is necessary, because it seems to most interpreters to be so intermingled with a prophecy of Christ's last coming at the end of the world, that it is no easy matter to separate those two prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the world. Besides that, it is encumbered with some other difficulties, arising from some particular expressions in this famous prediction of our Saviour's.

From the 34th verse of the 23d chapter of St. Matthew, to the 29th of the 24th chapter, there is a clear prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, with the preceding signs, and concomitant and subsequent circumstances of it: but at the 29th verse, the prophecy of the end of the world seems to be designedly joined to it: for the evangelist says,

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened," &c. Where he enumerates dismal signs, and forerunners of the dissolution of all things; but it is now sixteen hundred years since the destruction of Jerusalem, and yet the world is not at an end. How is it then that the evangelist says, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days?" This is the first difficulty.

Secondly, After this prophecy of the end of the world, we find these words in all the three evangelists, "Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled." As if not only the destruction of Jerusalem, but the end of the world were to happen in that age. This is the other difficulty.

But notwithstanding all this, I doubt not but by comparing the three evangelists together, to make the series and order of these prophecies very clear.

In order whereunto, we are to consider that our Saviour in this prophecy foretells three things very distinct in time.

1. The destruction of Jerusalem.

2. The fate and condemnation of the Jewish nation after this desolation, and during their captivity among the gentiles, among whom they were to be scattered. And this we have clearly and fully expressed by St. Luke, xxi. 23, 24. "There shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the gentiles, until the time of the gentiles be fulfilled." So that this prediction comprehends from the destruction of Jerusalem all the time of the captivity of the Jews among the gentiles, which we see is not yet

expired, and God alone knows how long it shall last. And then,

3. Forerunning signs of the end of the world, which the evangelists say shall happen "after the tribulation of those days;" that is, when God hath made an end of punishing the nation of the Jews. And this seems to me wholly to clear and take off the first difficulty.

As to the second, namely, that, after the prophecy of the end of the world, we find these words added by our Saviour, "Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things shall be fulfilled," which seems to intimate that the end of the world should happen in that age: for the answering of this, I shall not betake myself to that refuge which some have done, by explaining these words thus—"this generation," that is, this nation, "shall not pass away," shall not be utterly destroyed, but shall remain scattered up and down the world, as a monument of God's displeasure against them, till the end of all things. For though the expression γενεὰ αὕτη, "this generation," may well enough be translated "this nation—this race of people;" yet the precedent words will not admit this interpretation; for it is said in the verse immediately before, "So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." So that our Saviour speaks of something very near at hand, which necessarily confines it to that generation.

Therefore, the plain solution of this difficulty is this: that our Saviour ends his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the world, at the 31st verse, where he says, that "the Son of man shall send his angels with a great sound of a

trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." And then he makes some reflections upon what he had foretold concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the world.

(1.) As to the destruction of Jerusalem, he tells them a parable of the fig-tree, that, by the putting forth of its leaves, we know that the summer is nigh; "So likewise, when ye shall see all these things," namely, all those signs which I have given you of the destruction of Jerusalem, "know that it is near, even at the doors;" and then he adds, "Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away until all these things be fulfilled;" that is, many of those who are now alive, shall live to see all those signs which I have mentioned. And then,

(2.) He reflects upon his prediction of the end of the world, (ver. 36.) "But of that day and hour knoweth no man," &c. that is, not of that other day, of which I have been speaking, namely, of the end of the world, no man knows; as if he had said, The signs which I have given of the destruction of Jerusalem, are as plain, as the budding of the fig-tree is a sign of summer: but I have not given such plain signs of the end of the world, and the day of judgment. That I have declared to you in dark allegories, of the sun's being darkened, and the moon's not giving her light, and the stars falling from heaven; which cannot be understood literally, and the mystical meaning of them is very hidden.

And thus I hope I have removed those difficulties, and made the order and series of this prophecy very clear.

Secondly, I come in the next place to expound the particulars of this prophecy, so far as it concerns the destruction of Jerusalem, as we find them in the 24th of St. Matthew, compared with the other two evangelists that wrote of it, St. Mark and St. Luke; and to shew the exact accomplishment of each of these particulars, not only from the tradition of Christians, but from the writings of the Jews and heathens, which are so much the stronger on our side, because they are the testimonies of enemies. And, in the expounding of this prophecy, I shall distinctly consider these three things:

1. Our Saviour's general prediction of the siege, and total destruction of the city of Jerusalem, and of the temple, which you have from the 34th verse of the 23d chapter, to the 3d verse of the 24th.

2. His prediction of the signs that should forerun the destruction of Jerusalem, from verse the 3d to verse the 21st.

3. The concomitant and subsequent circumstances of it, from verse 21, to verse 29.

1. Our Saviour's general prediction of the siege of Jerusalem, and of the total destruction of the city. This our Saviour foretells, (Luke xix. 41—44.) "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side; and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee: and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." So Josephus

tells, lib. vi. that Titus raised a wall round about Jerusalem, and kept them in on every side; so that none could come out, though many thousands were famished with hunger; which was so sad and dismal a calamity, that our Saviour, though he knew how just a cause there was for it, yet, out of very humanity and tenderness of nature, he could not but, upon the foresight of so sad a destruction, weep over it. He, indeed, expresseth his vehement desire that this might have been prevented; (Matt. xxiii. 37.) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Therefore, having brought this ruin wilfully upon themselves, he pronounceth the sentence of their desolation, (verse 38.) "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!" And at the beginning of the next chapter, when the disciples were shewing him the beautiful structure of the temple, he foretells, that "there should not one stone be left upon another, which should not be thrown down."

Now that all this was punctually accomplished, Josephus tells us, lib. vii. Bell. Jud. that when the Romans had taken the city, Cæsar gave order to lay it waste to the ground, excepting some part of the wall which was left for the guards of soldiers, and three of the strongest towers, which he ordered to be left for a standing monument of the Roman courage; but all the rest of the city was so levelled, that no man that should come to see it, could believe that it was ever inhabited.

And our Saviour's prediction of the utter ruin of the temple, was most remarkably fulfilled. For the

Roman history tells us, that Turnus Rufus, with a plough-share, did tear up the foundation of the temple, and left no part of it, not so much as underground, undissolved. So that our Saviour's prophecy was literally fulfilled, "There was not left one stone upon another, that was not thrown down.

2. I shall next consider our Saviour's prediction of the signs which should forerun the destruction of Jerusalem; namely, these eight:

First, That there should rise up false and counterfeit Christs, or Messiases.

Secondly, Great judgments should befal the world, and particularly that nation, not long before that time; there should be "wars, and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, in divers places."

Thirdly, Fearful sights and signs from heaven.

Fourthly, Persecution of the Christians.

Fifthly, That upon this occasion there should be a great apostacy of Christians.

Sixthly, That upon this persecution many false prophets or teachers should arise.

Seventhly, That there should be an universal publication of the gospel before this great desolation should happen.

Eighthly and lastly, which was to be the most immediate sign and forerunner of their ruin, "The abomination of desolation should be seen standing in the holy place." And these you have set down from the 3d verse of this 24th chapter, to the 21st, which I shall briefly expound, and shew how the event did correspond to the prediction.

Our Saviour having before foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in general, the disciples come to him, and ask him two questions;

"When these things should be? and what should be the sign of his coming?" that is, in judgment, to destroy Jerusalem, and what "should be the signs of the end of the world?" I shall only consider the first, the signs that should forerun the destruction of Jerusalem, as being only pertinent to my present purpose.

First, He foretells there should be false and counterfeit Christs, or Messiases: (ver. 3, 4.) "Take heed that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many." This our Saviour gives as one of the first signs, and therefore, St. Luke adds, (chap. xxi. 8.) "The time draweth near," that is, it should not be long before this sign should appear; and it accordingly happened. Josephus mentions several of these; of whom, though Josephus do not expressly say that they called themselves the Messias, yet he says that which is equivalent, that they undertook to rescue the people from the Roman yoke, which was the thing which the Jews expected the Messias should do for them: and therefore we find, (Luke xxiv. 21.) that the disciples that were going up to Emmaus, and knew not that Christ was risen, and were doubtful what to think of him, because it was the third day, they say, "We hoped this had been he that should have redeemed Israel;" that is, they hoped this had been the Messias, that being, it seems, a common periphrasis of the Messias, that he was he that was to deliver Israel. Such as one Theudas pretended himself to be; not that Theudas of whom Gamaliel speaks (Acts v. 36.), but another of the same name, who, about twelve years after our Saviour's death, when one Cuspius Fadus was procurator of Judea, rose and seduced the people;

of whom Josephus (lib. xviii.) gives this account—that, being a sorcerer, he rose up, and deceived many; which is the very expression our Saviour useth, "they shall deceive many." This man persuaded a great multitude to bring their goods and follow him down the river Jordan, which he promised by his command to divide, and to give them a safe passage over it. But while he was thus playing the fool among the people, Fadus sent some forces, and surprised him and his company, killing many of them, and cutting off his head; and so there was an end of him.

Such likewise were those impostors, which, about two-and-twenty years after our Saviour's death, were so rife among them, when Felix was governor of Judea; of whom Josephus tells us, that they drew multitudes after them into the wilderness, promising to work great signs and wonders before them; which agrees exactly with the description which our Saviour gives of the false Christs and false prophets (ver. 24.), where he says, that they should "shew great signs and wonders," *σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα*, the very words which Josephus useth. And, (ver. 26.) "If they shall say to you, He is in the desert, go not forth;" answerable to what Josephus says, "that they drew many after them into the wilderness."

Such an one likewise was the Egyptian prophet, who, as Josephus tells, came to Jerusalem much about the same time, and persuaded the people to follow him to Mount Olivet, persuading them, that from thence they should see the walls of Jerusalem fall, and so might enter the city; which Felix understanding, sent soldiers, and slew and took several of them, but the Egyptian impostor himself made

an escape; which is the reason of that saying of the chief captain to Paul, (Acts xxi. 38.) "Art not thou the Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar," &c.

Such another was that impostor (if he be distinct from the former) who, as Josephus tells us, about three years after, under Festus Portius, the procurator, deceived the people with vain promises of deliverance and ease from their oppressions, if they would follow him into the wilderness; but Festus sent soldiers, and destroyed him and his company.

"And shall deceive many;" that is, by raising false expectations in the people, shall draw them into ruin, as Josephus tells us they did many of the Jews. And this our Saviour elsewhere foretold as a just judgment of God upon them for rejecting of him who was the true Messias; (John v. 43.) "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive."

Secondly, The next sign our Saviour gives, is "wars, and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes," &c. (ver. 6, 7.) "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars." About this time the Jews began to be set upon in several places, by the command of the emperor, and many thousands of them were slain at Alexandria and Babylon, as Josephus tells us. And there was a fear and rumour of a general war denounced against them by Caius Caligula, the emperor, unless they would receive his statue into the temple. Upon this rumour the whole nation was in great astonishment, insomuch that the Jews left their business, and neglected to till their grounds, expecting the Romans would have fallen upon them; of which consternation, both Josephus and Philo give us a particular account.

Our Saviour adds, "See that ye be not troubled; for these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet;" that is, when you see the nation in this danger from the Romans, be not ye troubled, as the Jews will be, thinking now will be the ruin of the nation. This and many other things will happen, before the final end come. And accordingly it fell out. For so Josephus and Tacitus tell us, that this storm was blown over by the sudden death of the emperor.

(Verse 7.) "Nation shall rise up against nation." Which happened under Claudius and Nero, the two next Roman emperors, when, in several cities, as Cesarea, Ptolemais, and many others, the Jews, and those of other nations that inhabited those cities, fell upon and destroyed one another, as may be read at large in Josephus.

And "kingdom against kingdom." This seems to refer to the several provinces or tetrarchies in Palestine, which were also called kingdoms, which at this time had cruel wars against one another; as the Jews and the Galileans against the Samaritans, and several others that Josephus speaks of.

"And there shall be famines and pestilences;" accordingly Josephus tells us, that under Claudius Cæsar there was a great famine in Judea; namely, that which was prophesied of by Agabus (Acts xi. 28.) And this Grotius very probably supposeth to be the reason why St. Paul, in his epistles written about that time, is so earnest with the Christians to send relief to the saints at Jerusalem. "Pestilences," they usually follow famine; "and earthquakes, in divers places," which happened in the times of Claudius and Nero. Philostratus speaks of a great earthquake that happened in Crete in the time of Claudius, and in several other places, as Smyrna, Chios,

Samos, &c. not long before the destruction of Jerusalem; Tacitus speaks of one in Asia about the same time. And though these were at a greater distance than the other signs which our Saviour mentions, yet the Jews could not but hear of them, because several of the nation were dispersed into some of those places.

Thirdly, "Fearful sights and signs from heaven." So St. Luke, (chap. xxi. 11.) "There shall be fearful sights, and great signs from heaven." Josephus gives us a clear comment upon this; Bell. Jud. lib. vii. says he, "This wretched people believed impostors and counterfeits; but those great signs and prodigies which did forerun their desolation, they neither minded, nor believed." A little before their destruction (he tells us) there hung over their city a fiery sword, which continued for a year together. A little before their rebellion against the Romans, there appeared a comet, which shined so clear in the temple, and about the altar, as if it had been day. And the same day an heifer, that was led to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the middle of the temple. The eastern gate of the temple, which was of massy brass, and very heavy, and could scarce be shut by the strength of twenty men, and was constantly made fast with strong locks and bars, flew open at midnight, which, when it was told to the magistrate, and he came to see it, they could scarce get strength enough to shut it. One evening not long before their desolation, there were seen in the air chariots and armies hovering over the city. At the feast of Pentecost, the priests, going one night into the temple, according to their custom, first heard a noise, and afterwards a sudden voice, saying, "Let us go hence." And, which is very terrible, one Jesus, a plain countryman, four years

before any troubles began, when the city was in a deep peace, came up to Jerusalem, and upon one of their festivals, began to cry out with a loud voice, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the temple, a voice against bridegrooms and brides, a voice against the people." And thus he went about crying day and night; and being seized on by the magistrate, and punished and tortured, he would not give over, but still went crying about, "Woe, woe to Jerusalem!" And thus he continued for seven years and five months together, and was neither weary nor hoarse until the city was besieged, and then he was quiet; but one time went up upon the walls, and cried with a loud voice, "Woe, woe to the city, and the temple, and the people!" and added, "Woe also to myself!" and immediately was struck dead by a stone out of a cross-bow.

Were not these "fearful sights, and great signs from heaven?" and these we have all related by one of the most prudent historians, who lived at that very time, and that very place; and he says, that many were alive when he wrote, and could attest all this.

(Verse 8.) "All these are the beginning of sorrows." The Scripture usually compares the greatest sufferings and afflictions to the pains of a woman in travail, to which our Saviour here alludes, and says, "These were but the first pangs, nothing to those throes which should come at last."

These are three of the signs forerunning the destruction of Jerusalem, which were predicted by our Saviour. There are yet five more, which I reserve for my next discourse on this subject.

SERMON CCXXXVIII.

THE EVIDENCES OF THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.—2 COR. iv. 3, 4.

THE fourth evidence, which those who lived in our Saviour's time had of his Divine authority, was, the spirit of prophecy, proved to be in him, and made good by the accomplishment of his predictions.

I have given five instances of our Saviour's predictions, and am now treating of them, viz. his foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, with the circumstances of it.

In explaining the particulars of this prophecy, I proposed three things to be considered:

1. Our Saviour's general prediction of the siege, and total destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

2. His predictions of the signs that should forerun it.

3. His predictions of the concomitant and subsequent circumstances of it.

I am upon the second of these, viz. our Saviour's prediction of the signs that should forerun the destruction of Jerusalem; three of which I have despatched, and now proceed to those which remain.

Fourthly, Another sign which our Saviour fore-

told, as a forerunner of the destruction of Jerusalem, was, persecution of the Christians. "They shall deliver you to be afflicted, and shall kill you." St. Mark expresseth it more particularly; (Mark xiii. 9.) "But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils, and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten, and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them." And these did partly happen before the forementioned calamities, and partly upon them: but our Saviour first reckons by themselves the common calamities of the nation; and then he comes to those which did concern his disciples and followers; and this follows very fitly upon the former more general calamities. For we find the fathers in their apologies every where complaining, that the Jews and heathens laid the blame of all the judgments and calamities which befel them, as famine, pestilence, and earthquakes, upon the Christians, as the causes of them; and from this pretence they many times took occasion to persecute them.

"They shall deliver you to be afflicted." This was fulfilled in delivering some of the apostles to be whipped and imprisoned by the chief priests and rulers, as Peter and John; or giving them up to the Roman power, as they did James and Peter to Herod; Paul to Gallio, Felix, and Festus, and last of all to Nero.

"And shall kill you." St. Luke saith, "some of you;" for of others he saith, "that not a hair of their head should fall to the ground." Thus Stephen was killed by a popular tumult; and the two Jameses were put to death under colour of a judicial process; the one stoned by the council of the Jews, and the other put to death by Herod.

"And ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." Which began under Nero, who, charging the Christians with the burning of the city, as Tacitus tells us, when himself had set it on fire, tortured many of them as guilty of the fact. "For my name's sake." This was exactly fulfilled, in that the Christians were so miserably persecuted for no other cause, but for being called Christians. They did not punish them for opposing their idolatry, for that the Jews did as well as the Christians, who yet escaped their malice; nor could they lay any other crime to their charge. Hence was that common saying among the heathens, *Vir bonus Caius Sejus; tantummodo quod Christianus.*

Fifthly, And upon this persecution, the apostacy of many from Christianity; (verse 10.) "Then shall many be offended;" that is, fall off from Christianity because of these persecutions; as we read several did, Demas, Hermogenes, Phygellus, and probably several others.

"And they shall betray one another, and hate one another." Which was remarkably fulfilled in the sect of the gnostics, who did not only decline persecution themselves, but joined with those that persecuted the Christians, as ecclesiastical history tells us.

Sixthly, That likewise upon this occasion of persecution "many false prophets should arise and deceive many," (ver. 11.) which seems to refer to Simon Magus, who gave himself out to be the power of God, and to the other heads of the gnostic sect. (Ver. 12.) "And the love of many shall grow cold, because iniquity shall abound." Which seems to refer likewise to the gnostics, of whom St. John, in his First Epistle, doth so frequently make mention

of their name; as "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments," &c. of whom he doth so much complain for want of love to their brethren.

(Verse 13.) "But he that shall endure to the end shall be saved;" that is, he that shall continue constant in the profession of the faith, notwithstanding these persecutions and apostacies, and false teachers that shall arise, shall be saved.

Seventhly, That there should be an universal publication of the gospel, before this great desolation should happen: (ver. 14.) "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations." And this was accomplished before the destruction of Jerusalem: for the gospel was published all over the Roman empire, before that time: and that is it which is here meant by "the world," in the same sense that Augustus is said by St. Luke, "to have taxed all the world." And this is the very phrase which the Romans constantly used, calling the Roman empire, *imperium orbis terrarum.* And that the gospel was thus published, we may easily believe, if we consider how many were sent forth for this purpose, and what indefatigable pains they took in this work; especially St. Paul, who preached from Jerusalem to Illyricum, which, according to the account which he gives of the journey, is computed to be no less than two thousand miles, and yet he made considerable stays in many places.

"For a witness unto all nations;" that is, that all nations might be convinced of the unreasonable obstinacy of the Jews, before God brought those dreadful calamities upon that nation.

"And then shall the end come;" that is, the final

destruction of the Jews, the total desolation of the Jewish church and commonwealth, according to the prophecy of Jacob, (Gen. xlix. 10.) which put these two signs together, that "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be"

Eighthly, The last and most immediate sign and forerunner which he gave of their destruction, is, "the standing of the abomination of desolation in the holy place:" (ver. 15.) "When ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place; then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains." There is a great difference among expositors, what is here meant by "the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place." Some refer it to the statue of Adrian the emperor, placed where the temple was at Jerusalem. But that cannot be, because that was a long time after the destruction of Jerusalem, and therefore could not be given by our Saviour for a sign and forerunner of it. Others (as Capellus) refer it to the faction of the zealots, which, before Titus came to besiege Jerusalem, seized upon the temple, and profaned it by bloodshed and slaughter, and made so horrible a devastation in the city. And this would not be improbable, if St. Luke had not given us so clear an interpretation of it; (Luke xxi. 20, 21.) who, instead of "the abomination of desolation," mentioned by St. Matthew and St. Mark, puts the Roman armies: "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains." So that, according to St. Luke, "the abomination of desolation

standing in the holy place," is the Roman armies compassing Jerusalem; which, therefore, is called "the abomination of desolation," because it would cause so great a desolation among them. "When ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh:" and it is said to "stand in the holy place," because Jerusalem was the holy city, and so many furlongs about it were accounted holy. Now when the Roman army should approach within the limits of the holy ground, then the "abomination of desolation" might be said to "stand in the holy place:" but the word *abomination* seems particularly to refer to the Roman ensigns, upon which were the images of their emperors, which the Romans worshipped, as Suetonius expressly tells us; and Tacitus calls them their *bellorum dii*, their gods of war. Now it was an abomination to the Jews to see these idols set up within the limits of the holy city. To which I may add, what Josephus tells us afterward, that the Romans, after they had conquered the city, set up those ensigns in the ruins of the temple, and sacrificed to them,

(Verse 15.) "Then let them that be in Judea flee to the mountains; and let him which is on the house-top not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field, return back to take his clothes;" which are several expressions to signify what haste the Christians would make, when they saw the Romans making so near approaches to Jerusalem.

"Let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains." Some refer this to the last siege by Titus; but I see no probability for that; for the Jews did not permit any to go out of the city. Others refer

it to Vespasian's drawing his forces toward Jerusalem sometime before the siege, but hearing of the death of Nero, the emperor, he forbore to besiege it till he had received orders from the new emperor; and that this was a warning to the Christians, and they took their opportunity then to flee into the mountains. But this could not be neither, because, for a good while before, the faction of the zealots under John and Simon's faction, who lay without the city, did slay all who endeavoured to escape out of the city. If we limit these words to Jerusalem (which the text does not) the most probable time was when Jerusalem was first compassed by the Roman army under Cestius Gallus, who afterward withdrew his siege; and then, indeed, those that would, had liberty to flee away. And at this time Josephus doth say that many did flee, foreseeing the approaching danger. But there is no reason to confine it to Jerusalem; for our Saviour's words are more large, "Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains." And if so, there is an express passage in Josephus to this purpose: that when Titus was drawing up his forces towards Jerusalem, a great number of those who were at Jericho went from thence, εἰς τὰ ὀρεινῆ, into the mountainous places, and thereby consulted their own safety.

(Verse 15.) "Let him that is on the house-top not come down to take any thing from thence." Our Saviour alludes to the fashion of the Jewish houses, which had plain roofs, upon which they used to walk; and he bids them make such haste, that when they saw this sign they should not think of saving any thing in their houses, but to betake themselves presently to the mountains for safety.

(Verse 16.) " Neither let him that is in the field return back to take his clothes." Another expression to signify what haste they should make from the approaching danger.

(Verse 17.) " But woe unto them that are with child, and to those that give suck in those days," because of the impediment that this would be to their flight. Or, possibly, it may refer to the dreadful story, not paralleled in any place or age, which Josephus tells of one Mary, who, in the time of the siege, out of very famine, boiled her sucking child and eat it. And therefore St. Luke (xxi. 23.) does mention this of the women's being with child, not as an impediment to flight, but as an instance of the great calamity that should befal them: (Luke xxi. 23.) " But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days: for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people."

(Verse 18.) " But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, nor on the sabbath-day." " Not in winter," because of the hardness of the season, and the difficulty of travelling and living upon the mountains: " nor on the sabbath-day." This concerned the Christian Jews as well as others, most of which observed the Jewish law and rites after our Saviour's death, till the desolation of the Jewish state and temple, as appears out of the history of the Acts. For though St. Paul stood for the liberty of the gentiles, yet it appears from Acts xxi. 21. that he vindicated himself from the calumny or aspersion which was cast upon him, as if he taught the Jews which were among the gentiles to forsake Moses, and that they ought not to circumcise their children, nor to walk after their customs. So that

the Christian Jews, retaining the observance of the Jewish sabbath, upon which it was not lawful to go any farther than a sabbath-day's journey, which was scarce two miles; if the danger should happen at that time (as the Romans usually took advantages to make all their onsets on that day, knowing the superstition of the Jews in that point) they must needs have been in great perplexity.

Having thus particularly treated of the signs which our Saviour foretold, as the forerunners of the destruction of Jerusalem, I proceed,

3. To consider the concomitant and subsequent circumstances of it. As,

1. The unparalleled greatness of their calamity.

2. The arising of false Christs.

3. Their being led into captivity, and dispersed up and down in the world.

4. Their continuance in this captivity and dispersed state out of their country, till the gospel had had its course among the gentiles.

1. The unparalleled greatness of their calamity and destruction; (ver. 19.) "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, neither ever shall be." This is a very material circumstance in this prophecy, that the calamity of the Jews should be so strange and unparalleled as never was in the world before: for though it might easily have been foretold from the temper of the people, which was prone to sedition, that they were very like to provoke the Romans against them; yet there was no probability that all things should have come to that extremity; for it was not the design of the Roman government to destroy any of those provinces which were under them, but only to keep them in subjection, and reduce them by

reasonable severity in case of revolt. But that such a calamity should have happened to them under Titus, who was the mildest and farthest from severity of all mankind, nothing was more unlikely; and that any people should conspire together to their own ruin, and so blindly and obstinately run themselves into such calamities, as made them the pity of their enemies, was the most incredible thing; so that nothing less than a prophetical spirit could have foretold so contingent and improbable a thing as this was.

St. Luke expresseth the dismal calamity that should happen to them in other words, but much to the same sense: (Luke xxi. 22, 23.) "For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days: for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people." And to this Josephus fully gives testimony, as will appear, both by what he says in general concerning their calamity, and by the particular account of their miseries and sufferings.

(1.) In general he tells us, "that never was any age so fruitful of misery as this was;" and almost in our Saviour's words, in his preface to his books of the siege of Jerusalem, he says, that "all the calamities that had fallen upon any nation from the beginning of the world, were but small in comparison of what happened to the nation of the Jews in that age." And in his sixth book he says, that "as there was never any nation so wicked, so never any nation suffered such calamitous accidents." But this will best appear,

(2.) By a brief and particular enumeration of

their calamities. Not to mention the burning and destroying of several of their chief cities, as Zabulon, Gadara, Japha, Jotapatah, Joppa, and several others, I shall insist chiefly upon the sufferings of the people themselves, by their tumults and seditions against the Romans. Before the coming of Vespasian, there were slain at Jerusalem and in Syria two thousand, at Askalon two thousand five hundred, at Ptolemais two thousand, at Alexandria fifty thousand, at Joppa eight thousand four hundred, at Mount Asamon two thousand, at Damascus ten thousand, and afterward at Askalon by Antonius a Roman commander eighteen thousand; in all, almost one hundred thousand.

By Vespasian in Galilee and other parts, very great numbers; at Japha fifteen thousand, at Mount Gerizim eleven thousand six hundred, at Jotapatah (the city of which Josephus our historian was governor) forty thousand, at Joppa four thousand, at Tarichæa near upon eight thousand, at Gamala nine thousand, at Giscala two thousand; in all fourscore and ten thousand.

Afterward, by their own seditions at Jerusalem, eight thousand five hundred at several times: and afterward, by the faction of the zealots, twelve thousand of the chiefest and noblest of the citizens were slain at one time; at the river Jordan by Placidus thirteen thousand, besides many thousands drowned, so that the river was filled up almost with dead carcasses: at two towns in Idumæa by Vespasian ten thousand, at Gerasa one thousand; in all forty-five thousand.

Whilst Vespasian was thus wasting the cities of Judea, the faction of the zealots filled all places at Jerusalem, even the temple itself, with continual slaughters; and after they had conquered Ananus,

who stood for the people against the zealots, and got all into their own hands, they were divided into parties, and made slaughter of one another; and one party let in Simon, who headed a seditious multitude, which he brought out of the country; and after that they were subdivided into three parties, John's, and Eleazer's, and Simon's, which held several parts of the city, and day and night continued to destroy one another; in which seditions all their granaries of corn, and magazines of arms, were burnt; so that though provision had been laid in the city, that would have sufficed for several years, yet, before they came to be besieged by Titus, they were almost reduced to famine.

And after they were besieged, at the first they united a little against the Romans; yet, after a few days, they divided again into factions, and more of them were slain by one another's hand, and with more cruelty, than by the Romans; insomuch that Titus, the general of the Romans, wept several times, to consider the misery they brought upon themselves; and their very enemies were more pitiful towards them, than they to one another.

After two months' siege, the famine began to rage within, and then all manner of cruelties was exercised by the soldiers upon that miserable people; and at last they were brought to such necessity, that many endeavoured to flee out to the enemy, and yet were not permitted; but as many as were suspected of any endeavour to escape were cruelly killed. It is not to be imagined what barbarous inhumanities, in those straits, all exercised one towards another; snatching the meat out of one another's mouth, and from their dearest friends, and their very children.

And so obstinate were they, that neither those calamities which they suffered, nor the severity of

the Romans in crucifying many thousands of them before the walls, and threatening them all with the same death, in case they would not yield, in ripping open the bowels of two thousand of them in a night, who fled out of Jerusalem, upon a report that they had swallowed gold (as many of them had, Josephus, lib. vi. cap. 15.) nor all the kind messages of Titus, offering peace to them, and using all manner of intreaties and persuasions not to run upon their own ruin, could prevail with them to accept of a peace. And thus they continued, till by famine and force the city was taken, and then their provocation of the Romans to cruelty towards those they had got into their power was so great, that Titus was not able to withhold the soldiers from exercising great cruelties towards them.

In short, from the beginning of the siege, to the taking of the city, there were famished and slain by the factions among themselves and by the Romans one million one hundred thousand; the greatest number, and with the saddest circumstances, that is to be read of in any story.

Was not this "a time of great tribulation?" Were not these "days of vengeance" indeed? Was there ever a sadder accomplishment of any prediction, than these words of our Saviour had?

And after all this, the temple was burnt and made desolate, the whole city destroyed, and all their whole land seized by the Roman emperor, and the remnant of the people in other parts of the nation were prosecuted with great severity. Great numbers of Jews were destroyed at the taking of the castle of Herodion, and Machærus, and Massada, and in the thickets or wood of Jandes. And there were great slaughters of the Jews in other parts, at Antioch, in all places about Alexandria and Thebes,

and at Cyrene, so that it was visible that there was "wrath upon this people."

(Verse 22.) "And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days;" that is, if those calamities had lasted a little longer, there would not one Jew have been left alive: "but for the elect's sake," that is, for the sake of those Christians who were left among them, "those days were shortened:" God inclining the heart of Titus to shew pity towards the remnant, and not to suffer the nations to exercise any more cruelty towards them; particularly at Antioch (the first seat of the Christians). Josephus tells us, that when Titus came thither, the people petitioned him earnestly, that they might expel the Jews, but he told them that was unreasonable, for now their country was laid waste, there was no place for them to go to. Thus we see how, "for the elect's sake, those days were shortened."

2. Another circumstance, which was to follow the destruction of Jerusalem, was, the arising of false Christs, and false prophets, (ver. 23. 24.) "And then, if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ, or, lo, he is there! believe him not. For false Christs and false prophets shall arise, and shall shew signs and wonders." Such was Jonathan, who presently after the destruction of Jerusalem, as Josephus tells us, drew many into the wilderness of Cyrene, pretending that he would shew signs and wonders to them; therefore our Saviour adds, (ver. 25, 26.) "Behold, I have told you before.—Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth." There appeared in Egypt, Crete, and Cyprus, several other impostors, who gave themselves out to be Christs and false prophets, who applied the pro-

phecies of the Old Testament to these counterfeit Messiases; as they did that of Balaam concerning a "star coming out of Jacob" to Barchochebas, because his name signifies "the son of a star." And this was a notorious impostor in the time of Adrian the emperor, not many years after the destruction of Jerusalem, about twenty (as I remember) Eusebius counts; he had a great multitude followed him, which put to death many Christians, because they would not renounce Christ, and join with them against the Romans, and that was the cause of the death of some hundred thousands of them.

3. Another subsequent circumstance, was, the Jews being led into captivity, and dispersed into all nations. This St. Luke adds, (Luke xxi. 24.) "They shall be led away captive into all nations." I need not prove this out of history; we see the effect of it to this day.

4. That they should continue in this captivity and dispersed state, and their city remain in the power of the gentiles, "until the times of the gentiles were fulfilled." So also St. Luke tells us, (ver. 24.) "They shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the gentiles, until the time of the gentiles be fulfilled;" that is, till the gospel have had its course among the nations. And thus it is still with them at this day, Jerusalem is in the hands of other nations, and the captivity of the Jews continues; and when it shall end, God alone knows.

Having thus explained the particulars of our Saviour's prediction, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, I should in the next place proceed to make some reflections upon this prediction, and its punctual accomplishment; but this I reserve for the following discourse.

SERMON CCXXXIX.

THE EVIDENCES OF THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.—2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

In discoursing on the fourth evidence which those who lived in our Saviour's time had of his Divine authority, viz. the spirit of prophecy, proved to be in him, and made good by the accomplishment of his predictions, I came to consider that remarkable prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem.

In doing this, I proposed three things:

First, To explain the series and order of this prediction.

Secondly, To consider the particulars of it, as we find them in the 24th of St. Matthew, compared with the other two evangelists.

Thirdly, To make some reflections upon this prediction, and its punctual accomplishment. The two former of these I have despatched, and now proceed to what remains, viz. the

Third thing I propounded, which was, to make some reflections upon this prediction of our Saviour's concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, and the punctual accomplishment of it. And now that I have been so large in the explication of this

prophecy, I shall make use of this argument farther than I intended, not only to shew that those who lived in that age, and saw our Saviour's prediction so punctually answered by the event, might from hence be satisfied of the prophetic spirit of our Saviour, and consequently of his Divine authority; but likewise to shew of what force to the conviction of the Jews this consideration is, of the destruction of Jerusalem, and that long train of miserable consequences which followed upon it, and have lasted to this day.

And the reflections I shall make upon this shall be these:

I. That nothing less than a prophetic spirit could so punctually have foretold so many contingents, and improbable things, as this prediction of our Saviour's does contain in it. Such were some of those signs which did forerun the destruction of Jerusalem—as, the great famine which happened under Claudius; the several great earthquakes under Claudius and Nero; the universal publication of the gospel all over the Roman empire, in so short a space; those wonderful sights, and prodigious signs from heaven, so strange as are not to be paralleled in any history. And such likewise were the circumstances of the destruction of the city and the temple; as, that it should be an utter desolation, which was strangely accomplished, when, as Josephus tells us, the very mountain upon which the temple stood was almost burnt up and consumed with the fierceness of the fire; and the Roman history gives account of the plucking up of the very foundations of the temple, by Rufus Turnus: but the most remarkable circumstance of all, which is so fully expressed by our Saviour in this prediction, was, the

strange and unexampled calamities which should attend this destruction, such as never befel any people before, which our Saviour foretells in these words, " Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever shall be." And never had any words a more sad and full accomplishment than this part of our Saviour's prophecy had, in those woful miseries which befel that people by civil and intestine seditions, and the utmost extremity that famine could reduce a people to; besides the cruelties of a foreign enemy. No history makes mention of so vast a number of men, that in so short a time did perish in such sad circumstances; fourteen or fifteen hundred thousand within less than a year's space, and more of these by far cruelly murdered by one another's hands than by the Romans. So that these were " days of vengeance," and " of great tribulation," such as the world had never seen before, and " if they had not been shortened, no flesh could have been saved," as our Saviour adds in the prophecy; if things had gone on at that rate a little longer, not one of the Jewish nation would have been left alive.

Now that our Saviour should foretell so punctually the sad calamity of this people, I take to be one of the most material circumstances of this prophecy, and to be a thing so contingent and unlikely, that it could not have been foreseen, but by Divine inspiration. For though one might easily have foretold from the temper of the people, which was prone to sedition, and very impatient of the Roman government, that the Jews were very likely in a short time to provoke the Romans against them; yet there was no probability at all, that

things should have come to that extremity; for it was not in the design of the Roman government to destroy any of their provinces; but that such a calamity should have happened unto them under Titus, who was the mildest and farthest from cruelty of all mankind, nothing was more unlikely; that ever any people should have been so besotted, as the Jews were at that time, and have so madly conspired together to their own ruin, as they did; that they should so blindly and obstinately run themselves into such calamities, as made them the pity of their very enemies, was the most incredible thing in the world. Nothing but a prophetic spirit could have foretold an event so contingent, and so extremely improbable.

II. Not only those who lived in that age were capable of satisfaction concerning the accomplishment of this prediction of our Saviour; but that we also might receive full satisfaction concerning this, the providence of God hath so ordered it, as to preserve to us a more punctual and credible history of the destruction of Jerusalem, than there is of any other matter whatsoever so long since done.

And this is more considerable, than possibly at first we may imagine. For,

1. We have this matter related, not by a Christian (who might have been suspected of partiality, and a design to have paralleled the event with our Saviour's prediction), but by a Jew, both by nation and religion, who seems designedly to have avoided, as much as possibly he could, the very mention of the Christian name, and all particulars relating to our Saviour, though no historian was ever more punctual in all other things.

2. We have this matter related by one that was

an eye-witness of all those sad calamities that befel the nation of the Jews, and during the war in Galilee, against Vespasian, was one of their chief commanders, and being taken by the Romans, was in their camp all the time that Jerusalem was besieged.

3. As he was an eye-witness, and so able to give the truest account of those matters, so hath he always had the repute of a most faithful historian. Joseph Scaliger, who was a very good judge in these matters, gives this character of him; that he was *diligentissimus* καὶ φιλαληθέστατος, *omnium scriptorum;* "The most painful historian, and the greatest lover of truth, of any that he had ever read;" *De quo nos hoc audacter dicimus, non solum in rebus Judaicis, sed etiam in externis, tutius illi credi quam omnibus Græcis et Latinis historicis;* "Of whom (says he) I might confidently affirm, that not only in the Jewish affairs, but in all foreign matters, one may more safely rely upon his credit, than upon all the Greek and Latin historians put together."

4. There is no ancient history extant, that relates any matter with so much particularity of circumstances, as Josephus does this of the Jewish wars, especially the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.

5. That the providence of God may appear the more remarkable in this history, which is the only punctual one that hath been preserved down to us of this great action, it will be worth our observation to consider, how remarkably this person was preserved for the writing of this history.

When Vespasian made war upon Galilee, Josephus was chief commander there, and was besieged by Vespasian, in the city of Jotapatah; which, after a long and stout resistance, being taken by the Romans, he, with forty more, hid themselves in a cave,

where at last they were discovered by the Romans; which Vespasian hearing of, sent and offered them life; and Josephus would have accepted of their offer, but the rest would not permit him to yield himself, but threatened to kill him; and when by no persuasions he could take them off from this obstinate resolution, he was glad to propound this to them—that they should cast lots, two by two, who should die first, and he that had the second lot should kill the first, and the next him, and so on, and the last should kill himself. The providence of God preserved Josephus and another to the last lot; and when all the rest were killed, Josephus persuaded him to yield himself up to the Romans, and so they two escaped with their lives; by which remarkable providence he was preserved to write this history.

III. It seems very plain, from this relation which Josephus gives, that the Jewish nation were remarkably devoted by God to destruction, and most fatally hardened and blinded to their own ruin. This Josephus every where takes notice of, that there was a sad and black fate hung over the nation, and God seemed to have determined their ruin. And after the destruction of Jerusalem, when the castle of Massada was besieged by the Romans, Eleazer, the governor, in his speech to the soldiers, reckons up the sad symptoms of God's displeasure against them; and tells them, that from the beginning of the war it was easy for any one to conjecture, that God in great wrath had devoted the nation, which he formerly loved, to destruction.

And indeed all along the hand of God was very visible against them; for when, in the beginning of their rebellion, Cestus Gallus, the Roman com-

mander, had an opportunity to have taken Jerusalem, and to have put an end to the war; Josephus tells us, that God, being angry with them, would not permit it, but did reserve them for a greater and sadder destruction. And afterward, when Vespasian renewed the war against them, Josephus tells us, that he used all kind of earnest persuasion with his countrymen to prevent their ruin, by submitting to the Roman government; but they were obstinate, and would not hearken to any moderate counsels. And when the sedition of the zealots began in Jerusalem, Josephus takes notice, that all the wisest men among them, and those who were most likely, by their interest and moderation, to have saved the city, were first of all cut off by the zealots, so that there were none left to persuade the people to moderate things.

They provoked the Romans against them all manner of ways; their seditions among themselves continued when the enemy was before their walls; and when in probability they might have held out so long as to have wearied the Romans, by their own seditions they burnt all their granaries, and provisions of corn, and magazines of arms, as if they had consulted the advantage of the Romans against themselves; and which, was very remarkable, Josephus tells us, that before the siege the fountain of Siloam was almost dried up, and all the springs about Jerusalem, so that water bore a great price; but as soon as Titus came before Jerusalem, the springs broke out again, and there was never greater plenty; which if it had not happened, the Roman armies could very hardly have subsisted. And after the temple was destroyed, when Titus would have given John and Simon, and the rest of the zea-

lots, their lives, they would not submit, but were all destroyed by their own obstinacy. At Massada, rather than yield to the Romans, nine hundred men, women, and children, killed one another; so that when the Romans entered the castle, they found them all dead, except one woman and a child that had hidden themselves.

Philostratus tells us, that when some of the nearer nations would have crowned Titus for his victories over the Jews, he refused it, saying, That he deserved nothing upon that account, for it was not his work, but God had made him the instrument of his wrath against that people. So that there were never greater acknowledgments of a Divine hand against any people, than at this time against the Jews. Never was there greater courage and contempt of death in any people, and yet they were conquered by numbers much inferior to them. Never was any soldier so merciful as Titus was, and so solicitous to have spared the effusion of blood; and yet he was necessitated, against his nature, to exercise great cruelties towards them. Many times he endeavoured, by the most severe inhibitions, to restrain the cruelties of the soldiers towards them; and when he found that they ripped open the bowels of the Jews who fled out of Jerusalem, in hopes to find gold which they had swallowed, he was much enraged against the soldiers, and would have put all to death that were engaged in that cruelty, but that he found them so many; and notwithstanding this, when he forbade the like cruelty to be exercised for the future, under the most severe penalties, yet Josephus says that the soldiers did not forbear privately to do it; and though, in other cases, such a severe prohibition would have

taken place; yet, says he, because God had devoted that people to ruin, all the ways which Titus used for the saving of them, turned to their destruction, (lib. vi. cap. 15.) Nay, there was as much blood shed by the dissensions among themselves, between those who desired peace with the Romans, and those that would not hearken to it, as by the Romans. So much reason was there for that passionate wish of our Saviour's concerning Jerusalem, "Oh! that thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." Never was any nation so infatuated; never were the things that tended to peace so strangely hidden from any people as from the Jews.

IV. It must needs be, that it was for some very great sin that God sent those dreadful calamities upon that nation. Josephus says, that it was sure for some greater impiety than that nation were guilty of, when they were carried away captive to Babylon. Nay, he says that the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were but small in comparison of those the Jews were guilty of; so that he says, that they were so ripe for destruction, that if the Roman army had not come when it did, he did verily believe that either an earthquake would have swallowed up the city, or a deluge overflown them, or fire from heaven have consumed them; which is very much the same with that the apostle says of them, (1 Thess. ii. 16.) that they were "filling up the measure of their sins, that wrath might come upon them to the uttermost."

Now what can we imagine their great sin should be at that time? All along the history of the Old Testament, usually, the great sin whereby they provoked God was their idolatry, for which God sent

many judgments upon them, and at last sold them into captivity. But when this desolation came upon them, and for a long time before, even ever after the captivity, they had been free from that great transgression, and were mightily bent against idolatry, so that they would rather die than commit that sin.

The account which Josephus gives of their sin, was their intestine seditions, and the cruelties and profanations of the temple that were consequent upon them. But that this could not be the original provocation, is plain, because, by the acknowledgment of Josephus and the Jews themselves, this was the greatest judgment and calamity that came upon them; yea, much greater than any thing which they suffered by the Romans; yea, so great, that it rendered them the pity of their very enemies; and when the Romans would have granted peace to them, and gladly have put an end to those miseries they saw them involved in, yet they continued their intestine seditions, and would not be taken off from destroying one another.

Let them then give us any probable account, for what great sin it was, that God first gave them up to this great judgment of an industrious endeavour to destroy one another; or if they cannot, let them believe the account which the history of the New Testament gives of it, and the truth whereof was so remarkably confirmed by the fulfilling of our Saviour's predictions against them. The apostle gives a clear account of their sin in the forementioned place, (1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.) that it was because "they had killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and persecuted the apostles:" by these steps they "filled up their sins, and wrath came upon them to the uttermost."

V. The punishment that was inflicted upon them hath very shrewd marks and signatures upon it, from which it is easy to conjecture, for what sin it was that they were thus punished. Titus laid his siege to Jerusalem at the very same time and season that the Jews crucified Christ, namely, at the time of the passover; and the very day that he began his siege, he crucified one before their walls, and afterward, almost the only cruelty that the Romans exercised towards them by the command and permission of Titus, was crucifixion; insomuch that sometimes five hundred were crucified in a day, till they wanted wood for crosses. So that they who earnestly cried out against our Saviour, "Crucify, crucify," had at last enough, God made them "eat the fruit of their own ways, and filled them with their own devices;" and they who had bought Christ for thirty pieces of silver, were afterwards themselves sold at a lower rate.

VI. Their religion was remarkably struck at, and affronted, as if God intended to put an end to that dispensation, and to abrogate their law. Most of their great calamities happened to them upon the sabbath-day, and upon their great festivals. Cestius Gallus sat down with his army before Jerusalem on the sabbath. Titus besieged them at the time of the passover. And Jerusalem was taken (as Dio, in his Roman history, observes) on the sabbath-day, that day for which the Jews have so great a veneration. The zealots profaned the temple by making it a garrison, and by the rapine and bloodshed committed in it; they brought the priesthood into contempt, by choosing the meanest of the people into the highest offices; they turned the materials of the temple into instruments of war. The Romans them-

selves were as much grieved to see how the Jews profaned the temple, as the Jews themselves ought to have been if it had been so profaned by the Romans; they are the very words of Josephus. And though Titus gave express orders, and used great endeavours to have saved the temple, and hazarded himself to have quenched it when it was on fire; yet he could not do it, but it was burnt to the ground: and afterward, when the priests came to him, and supplicated to him for their lives, contrary to his usual clemency, he commanded them to be slain, saying they came too late; that it was fit they should perish with the temple, and now that was destroyed, for the sake of which they should have been saved, he saw no reason to spare them. Afterward the Roman ensigns were set up upon the ruins of the temple, and the soldiers sacrificed to them; and their law was carried in triumph at Rome before Vespasian and Titus.

These were as great signs as could be, that God had a design to abrogate and put a period to that administration; especially if we take in this, which Ammianus Marcellinus, a heathen historian, tells us, that this temple could never be rebuilt, though it was attempted by the Jews several times, and that whenever they went about to lay the foundation, fire broke out of the foundation, and consumed the workmen.

I will add but one circumstance more, to shew that that dispensation was at an end. God seemed to have wholly given over his particular care of that people, and to have no longer regard to the covenant made with them, in which he had promised, that when they came up three times a year, from all parts of the land, to serve the Lord, he would so order

things by his providence, that the enemy should make no advantage of their absence from their borders; nay, the enemy should not then desire their land; and yet, notwithstanding this, at the time of the passover, when the whole nation were met at Jerusalem, Titus came upon them, and enclosed them all in the city.

VII. And lastly, Consider how God hath pursued the Jews with great severity ever since, making them to be stigmatized and hated in all nations; great cruelties and oppressions have frequently been exercised towards them; and, by a strange providence, God hath kept them distinct from other people, that they might remain as a monument of his displeasure; and considering how other colonies of people have fallen in, and been mixed with the inhabitants in an age or two, so as they never could be kept distinct for any long time; that the Jews for sixteen hundred years should still remain so, as it is an argument of the special providence of God, so it is one of the most material and standing evidences of the truth of our religion, that they should remain still as witnesses of the Old Testament; and as monuments of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the fierce wrath which God executed upon them for the crucifying of Christ.

Upon the whole matter, if so particular a prediction as this of our Saviour's concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, so punctually answered by the event, be not an argument of Divine inspiration, then there can be no evidence of any such thing as a spirit of prophecy. For what greater evidence of a true prophet, than to foretell so many things, so contingent and improbable; all which have accordingly afterward fallen out, just as they were foretold?

Suppose the Jews say true, that Jesus Christ was an impostor, and consequently justly put to death by them; what greater reflection upon the providence of God can be imagined, than that this person should be permitted to foretell, that such and such calamities should befal those that had put him to death, as a punishment upon them for that sin; and afterward all this should happen in so remarkable a manner, as the world cannot give the like instance? Is it in the least credible, that the Divine Providence should permit such things, as of necessity will give credit to an impostor, and would be good evidence, to a prudent and considerate man, that he was divinely inspired?

I have now done with the fourth head of our Saviour's predictions, namely, his prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem; which I have been the longer upon, because it is so considerable an evidence of the truth of our religion, and so strong an argument against the Jews, that, if they are not wrought upon by the consideration of the accomplishment of this prediction of our Saviour's, and the great severity of God still continued towards that nation, it can be ascribed to nothing but the just judgment of God, still hiding the things of their peace from their eyes, and giving them up to the same kind of fatal hardness and blindness, which sixteen hundred years ago was the cause of their destruction.

There remains yet one instance more of our Saviour's prophetic spirit, which I must reserve for another discourse.

SERMON CCXL.

THE EVIDENCES OF THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.—2 COR. iv. 3, 4.

I AM still upon the fourth evidence, which those who lived in our Saviour's time had of his Divine authority, viz. the spirit of prophecy, proved to be in him, and made good by the accomplishment of his predictions. Four instances I have already given, and now proceed to the

Fifth and last instance I shall give of our Saviour's prophetic spirit, viz. in those predictions which foretell the fate of the gospel in the world; what discouragements and difficulties the first publishers of the gospel should meet with from the persecutions which the powers of the world should stir up against them, and from the rising of false Christs and false prophets; what assistance they should find in the carrying on the work; and what success the gospel should have, notwithstanding the opposition that should be made against it. I shall speak briefly to these.

I. What discouragements and difficulties the first publishers of the gospel should meet with. Our Saviour foretells two great discouragements.

1. From the persecutions which the powers of the

world should stir up against them. This our Saviour gave his disciples early notice of, when he first called them together, and sent them forth, (Matt. x. 16—18.) " Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake." And, (ver. 21, 22.) " And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." And that the disciples might not be surprised with this, when it should happen, as an unexpected thing, a little before his death, when he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, he repeats this prediction to them again, as you may see, Matt. xxiv. 9. " Then they shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." And (Luke xxi. 12.) " But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake."

And all this we find punctually fulfilled in those persecutions that they met with at Jerusalem, and in other places wherever they went to preach the gospel, as you may read at large in the history of the Acts of the Apostles. And afterward in the persecutions raised against the Christians by the Roman emperors, where all kinds of cruelties and tortures were exercised upon them, and the Christians killed by thousands in a day, as if they would

have destroyed the very name of Christ out of the world, as every one knows that is acquainted with ecclesiastical history.

Particularly he foretold the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, that they should be put to death. Matt. xx. 23. saith he unto them, "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with." And this accordingly happened to them; for we find (Acts xii. 2.) that James was slain by Herod. Indeed St. John lived a great while after, as our Saviour foretold, (John xxi. 22.) that John should tarry till he came; that is, he should live till the destruction of Jerusalem, which is very frequently in the evangelists called "Christ's coming;" and so he did, and at last was put to death by the sword, as St. Chrysostom saith; though Justin, Irenæus, Clemens Alexandrinus, say nothing of it; and Origen and Tertullian say he died another death.

He likewise foretold Peter what kind of death he should die; namely, that when he was old, he should be crucified: (John xxi. 18, 19.) "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." And the evangelist adds, "This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God." And accordingly, he was crucified about forty years after, as Eusebius tells us, and several of the fathers.

2. Another great discouragement which our Saviour foretold they should meet with in the publishing of the gospel, was, from the rising of false Christs and false prophets. This our Saviour foretells, in

the 24th of St. Matthew, verse 5—24, That many should come in his name, and should deceive many; that there should "arise false Christs and false prophets, and shew great signs and wonders; insomuch, that, if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect." And this I have already shewn was fulfilled in those many impostors that rose up among the Jews, pretending themselves to be Messiases, and drawing many people after them, both before and after the destruction of Jerusalem; and in Simon, and the other heads of the gnostic sect, who did great prejudice to Christianity, by "turning the grace of God into wantonness," and abusing the holy doctrine of our Saviour to all manner of licentiousness, and drawing of Christians, not only to loose and filthy practices, but to a denial of the gospel for fear of persecution, and at last to join with the heathens in the persecuting of the Christians.

II. Our Saviour likewise foretold what assistance the apostles should find in the carrying on their work. He promised that he would be with them in the preaching of the gospel, (Matt. xxviii. 20.) More particularly before his ascension, he told them that they should receive power by the coming of the Holy Ghost upon them, whereby they should be qualified to be witnesses unto him, in Judea, and Jerusalem, and Samaria, and to the utmost parts of the earth, (Acts i. 8.) And (Matt. x. 19, 20.) our Saviour promiseth that his Spirit should direct them what to say, when they should be accused before kings and governors: "When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak: for it is not you that speak;

but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." And again to the same purpose, he encourageth them a little before his death: (Luke xxi. 14, 15.) "Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist."

And all this we find was made good to them after our Saviour's ascension. They were wonderfully assisted, and carried on above themselves in the preaching of the gospel. So the evangelist St. Mark tells us, (Mark xvi. 20.) that the apostles "went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." And all along in the history of the Acts, we find, that they were extraordinarily strengthened and assisted in the publishing of the gospel. And particularly our Saviour's prediction and promise were made good to St. Stephen, of whom it is said, (Acts vi. 10.) that when he was disputing with the Jews, "they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake."

III. Our Saviour foretold also what success the gospel should have, notwithstanding all the opposition that should be made against it; that it should be "published in all nations;" (Matt. xxiv. 14.) and in despite of all the malice of the Jews, and the potent opposition that the gentiles should make against the publishers of the gospel, they should "make disciples in every nation, and bear witness unto Christ to the uttermost parts of the earth:" (Matt. xxviii. 19. and Acts i. 8.) that he would "build his church upon a rock, and the gates of hell should not prevail against it:" (Matt. xvi. 18.) and this we find was done with great success, both

among the Jews and gentiles, as appears out of the history of the Acts of the Apostles, and other histories of the first ages of the church.

Particularly our Saviour foretold, that that act of kindness which Mary shewed to him, in anointing his head with precious ointment, should be remembered wherever the gospel was preached: (Matt. xxvi. 13.) "Verily, I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." And accordingly this little particular history hath every where been propagated with the gospel, and the fame of it hath spread as far as the notice of Christianity.

And thus I have done with the fourth and last evidence of our Saviour's Divine authority, namely, the prophetic spirit, which was proved to be in him, and made good by the punctual accomplishment of his predictions. I shall only shew that these instances which I have given, are clear arguments of a prophetic spirit in our Saviour. And this will appear, if we consider these two things:

First, That all these things which our Saviour foretold, were purely contingent in respect of us, that is, there was no necessity that they should come to pass; and consequently nothing but infinite knowledge could certainly foresee that they would.

Secondly, All or most of them were not only contingent, but exceedingly unlikely; there was no probability that they should happen; and, consequently, no one could reasonably and prudently have foreseen that they would. And these two things being made out, will abundantly evidence, that the foretelling of these things doth argue a prophetic spirit in our Saviour; and consequently

his Divine authority. Things that have necessary causes, if those causes be evident, any one may foretell that they will be; things that are probable, and likely to happen, every prudent man may reasonably conjecture that they will be, and consequently may in many cases successfully foretell them without a spirit of prophecy: but such things as in respect of us are purely contingent, and depend upon no necessary causes we know of, especially if they be withal unlikely to come to pass, no man can foretell but by the inspiration of that Spirit, whose infinite wisdom knows all things; and this is the true reason why the foretelling of future contingents hath always been looked upon as an argument of inspiration.

First, These things which our Saviour foretold were purely contingent; that is, there was no necessity in human reason that they should come to pass: and consequently no man without inspiration could certainly foretell them. Those things are said to be contingent in respect of us, which have no necessary cause that we know of; particularly those things which depend upon the will of free agents, either the will of men, or of God. And such were those things which our Saviour foretold; many of them depended upon the will of men, whether they should happen or not, supposing the permissive will of God, that is, that God had determined not to interpose and hinder them.

The death of Christ, with all the wicked and opprobrious circumstances of it, depended upon the will of men; and therefore it was a thing that no man could foresee whether it would be or not. So likewise the resistance and opposition that were made to the gospel by the persecutions of men, and

the malice of false prophets, did depend upon the wills of men.

But many of these events depended purely upon the will of God, which no man could foreknow, unless he did reveal it to him; and if he did, this was an argument of inspiration, which is the thing we are contending for. Of this kind were the resurrection of our Saviour from the dead; his being taken up into heaven; the miraculous powers and gifts wherewith the apostles and primitive Christians were endowed; the fatal destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation, contrary to the design of those who brought it to pass; the prevalency of the gospel in the world, in despite of all opposition made against it. All these were brought to pass in a more immediate manner by the power of God, and therefore depended purely upon his will.

Secondly, Most of the things which our Saviour foretold, were not only purely contingent in respect of us, and therefore could not without inspiration be certainly foreseen; but were also exceedingly unlikely and improbable in themselves, and therefore could not so much as prudently have been conjectured. And to make this out more fully, I shall run over the several instances of our Saviour's predictions, and shew how unlikely the things which he foretold were to have come to pass: and if this appear, it must be granted that our Saviour was a prophet.

1. Our Saviour's prediction concerning his own death and sufferings was a thing very unlikely to have come to pass. It was very likely that the pharisees and chief priests, whose interest was so much struck at, should have malice enough against him to design his ruin; but that ever they should

have accomplished it without a popular tumult and sedition, was very unlikely, considering the esteem and favour he had among the people. Who could have believed that the Jews, who had seen so many miracles, and received so great benefits by them, who were such admirers of his doctrine, and so astonished at it, who would have made him king, should ever have consented to have put him to death? Who could have thought that so soon after they had so unanimously brought him to Jerusalem in triumph with such hosannahs and acclamations, the same people should have been so eager to have him crucified? I know there is nothing more inconstant than the giddy and fickle multitude; nothing less to be relied upon than the opinion and applause of the people: but because the humour of the people is so uncertain, therefore, for this reason, it was hard to prophesy what they would do. And nothing was more improbable than that any should certainly foretell where this humour would at last fix and settle. Nay, it was very unlikely that they, who had been raised to so great and just an esteem of him, from a clear conviction of his innocence and holiness, and of the Divine power which attended him, should have had either the wickedness or the confidence to have gone about to compass the death of so innocent and Divine a person.

And it is very remarkable, that this was a thing so incredible to the disciples, that though our Saviour did several times, in the plainest words that could be, tell them of his death and sufferings, yet they could not understand it; that is, it could by no means sink into them, they could not apprehend that ever any such thing should come to pass; (Mark ix. 31, 32.) "For he taught his disciples, and said

unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and after that he is killed he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him." And (Luke ix. 43—45.) after our Saviour had done a great miracle, it is said, "they were all amazed at the mighty power of God: but while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not; and they feared to ask him of that saying." They looked upon it as a thing incredible, that he, who did such works, and was attended with such Divine power, should ever be "delivered into the hands of men:" if men should be so malicious as to design his death, yet it was not credible that God should give up such a person into their hands. And again, a little before his sufferings, he inculcates this more particularly upon them, (Luke xviii. 31—34.) "Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spit upon; and they shall scourge him, and put him to death." And then it is said of the disciples, that "they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken." What was the matter? Could any thing have been said in plainer words, than our Saviour's declaring this to them? No, certainly, they understood very well the mean-

ing of those words; for it is said, (Matt. xvii. 23.) that "when he said this to them, they were exceeding sorry," they were very much troubled to hear him say this; they understood very well what the words signified, and they were troubled at the first appearance and literal sense of them; but it seems they took them to be a parable, and to have some allegorical meaning hidden under them; for they could not imagine, that ever they should be literally true. And, that this was their apprehension, seems to be sufficiently intimated by both the evangelists, St. Mark and St. Luke, who, after they had told us that "the disciples understood not this saying," they immediately add, that "they feared to ask Christ of this saying;" that is, they did not understand whether they were to take this saying in the obvious and literal sense of it; or to look upon it as an allegory, or a parable that had some hidden sense; but being troubled at the saying, because the literal and obvious sense had a great deal of horror, they were afraid to ask our Saviour the meaning of it, (as they used always to ask him the meaning of his parables) for fear he should tell them that he intended it literally. Now from this it appears, how unlikely it seemed to the disciples, that our Saviour should suffer such things as he foretold of himself.

2. Our Saviour's predictions concerning his rising again out of the grave the third day; concerning his being taken up into heaven; concerning the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles, in such miraculous powers and gifts after his ascension, were all things very unlikely and incredible, because so exceeding strange, and above the common course of nature. We look upon it as a wonderful thing for a man certainly to foretell an ordinary thing: but

if any man should tell us, that, after he was dead, and had lain three days in the grave, he should rise again, and be visibly taken up into heaven, and from thence bestow miraculous gifts upon men, and this should accordingly come to pass; it were impossible not to think this man a prophet.

3. Our Saviour's prediction concerning the fatal destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation, was very unlikely. But this I spake to at large, when I explained the prophecy.

4. The fate which our Saviour foretold the gospel should have in the world, was a thing very improbable. That it should meet with great opposition and persecution was not strange; nothing being more likely than that a religion which was new to the world, so contrary to the principles of those who had been educated in another religion, and so opposite to the interests of men, should be opposed and resisted to the utmost: but then there are these three things very strange, which our Saviour foretold should attend the publication of the gospel.

(1.) That an action of no greater consideration than that was of Mary's anointing our Lord's head, and done privately, should be celebrated through the world in all ages; and the memory of it should be as far, and as long propagated, as the most famous actions of the greatest prince that ever was in the world.

(2.) This was strange and unlikely, which our Saviour likewise foretold, that false Christs, and false prophets and teachers, should arise after his death; that, after the Jews had been so severe to our Saviour, for giving out himself to be the Messias, though he gave such convincing evidence of it, this should not deter counterfeits from assuming so dan-

gerous a person; and that when Christianity was persecuted, there should arise false apostles, and false teachers, that should pretend to Christianity, when it was so odious a profession, that any should be found that should dissemble in a matter so full of hazard and danger; this was very strange and unlikely.

But, because this prediction of our Saviour's concerning false Christs and false prophets is aspersed by the atheists, and particularly by Vaninus, as one of the most cunning and crafty actions that our Saviour did; as if, after he had let himself into a reputation and esteem in the world, he had designed by this prediction to bolt the door against all others; therefore it will be requisite that I speak a little more particularly to this.

1. It is acknowledged by the atheists themselves, particularly by Vaninus, that it does not appear that our Saviour carried on any worldly design. Why then should he be suspected of it in this matter, which is capable of a good interpretation, when his whole life, and all the actions of it, do clear him of any such suspicion? But because it is said, that though he carried on no design for riches and power, yet he had a deep design to gain reputation and fame to himself in after-ages; therefore I shall add one or two considerations more, to shew how unreasonable, and how perfectly malicious, this jealousy is.

2. Let us consider, then, that this prediction of his would either be accomplished or not; but whether it was, or was not, it can be no argument of any design of vain-glory. If it had not come to pass (as I have shewn it was very unlikely it should, especially within the compass of the time which he had prefixed for it) then he had been a false prophet, and

so he had lost his reputation, by the very means whereby he intended to have established it, which I do not understand the craft and cunning of: for either he knew certainly that it would come to pass, or not; if he did, he was a true prophet; if he did not, he did not do politicly, in putting his reputation upon such a hazard.

3. If we suppose him, as this objection does, to have been an impostor, and consequently not to have believed his own doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and another life after this; what an apparent madness had it been to neglect the present advantages of this world, which he was capable of enjoying; and to lay out for a fame and reputation, after he was dead and extinguished, and consequently when he should not be capable of having any sense and enjoyment of it!

And the instance of the Romans, who ventured their lives out of vain-glory, to get a name after they were dead, will avail nothing in this case: because it plainly appears from all the heathen writers, that they did this upon a presumption of their immortality, and a persuasion that they should live in another world, and enjoy the pleasure of the fame by which their names should be celebrated in this world: but had they not been persuaded of this, it would have been the greatest folly in the world, to have ventured their lives to gain a fame after death, and to be spoken of with honour when they were not, and consequently could take no pleasure in it. This may suffice to be said in short, to this malicious and absurd objection. But,

(3.) This was strange and unlikely, that the gospel should have such success in the world. And the more likely it was that it should meet with so much

opposition and resistance, the more unlikely was it that it should prevail, especially by such means and in such manner as it did; that a few unlearned men, destitute of secular arts and learning, opposed by all the wit and power that the world could exert, should be able in the space of a few years to propagate and plant all over the known world a doctrine so despised and persecuted, so contrary to the almost invincible prejudice of education in another religion, so opposite to those two great governors of the world, the lusts and the interests of men; nothing could have been foretold so unlikely and improbable as this is; especially if we take in this, that the chief instrument of spreading this doctrine in the world was the fiercest opposer and persecutor of it, I mean St. Paul, who, by a light and voice from heaven, was taken off from persecuting Christianity, and became the most active and zealous instrument of its propagation. The wonderful success and prevalency of the gospel by such means, and in such circumstances of difficulty, and potent opposition made against it, are a plain indication, that this doctrine was assisted and countenanced from Heaven; that "it was of God, and therefore could not be overthrown." Nothing but the mighty force of truth could, naked and unarmed, have done such wonders in the world.

And thus I have, I hope, fully shewn that those who lived in the age of our Saviour, were capable of having sufficient assurance, that Jesus Christ, who declared the Christian religion to the world, was sent of God: from the prophecies concerning him; the testimonies that were given him by an immediate voice from heaven; the miracles that were wrought by him, and on his behalf;

and by the prophetic spirit, that gave evidence of his inspiration. And if any one doubt whether he gave these testimonies of his Divine authority to the world, let him consider that it is almost as great a miracle as any of those, that a doctrine preached by one that gave no testimony of his Divine authority to the world, should be so strangely propagated, and maintain its possession so long in the world; I say, let him consider this, and methinks this should convince him of the truth of Christianity.

SERMON CCXLI.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.—2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

In discoursing of the evidence of our Saviour's Divine authority, I proposed the considering three things.

First, What evidence they had who heard the doctrine of the gospel immediately from our Saviour.

Secondly, What evidence they had who received this doctrine by the preaching of the apostles.

Thirdly, What evidence after-ages have until the present time.

The first of these I have handled at large; and now proceed to the

Second, viz. To consider what assurance those who heard the doctrine of Christ from the apostles were capable of having concerning his Divine authority: and of this I shall give you an account in these three particulars:

First, They had all the assurance concerning this matter which men can have of any thing from the testimony of credible eye and ear-witnesses.

Secondly, They had this testimony confirmed by miracles.

Thirdly, They had yet a farther evidence of the divinity of this doctrine, from the wonderful prevalency and success of it, by such improbable and unlikely means.

First, Those who received the doctrine of Christ from the apostles, had all the assurance of Christ's Divine authority that men can have of any thing from the testimony of credible eye and ear-witnesses. The apostles who immediately conversed with our Saviour, and heard his doctrine, and saw his miracles, they had the testimony of their own senses for his Divine authority; they heard and saw the attestations which God gave to him; and those to whom the apostles preached, received all this from them, as from eye and ear-witnesses. So that those who received the doctrine of Christ from the apostles, had all the arguments which the apostles had, to satisfy them concerning Christ's Divine authority, only they were not conveyed to them in so immediate a manner. The apostles saw and heard those things themselves, which gave them satisfaction that Jesus Christ came from God: those to whom the apostles preached, received these things from their testimony.

And this also was a sufficient ground of assurance, as will clearly appear, if we can make out these two things.

I. That the apostles were credible witnesses. And,

II. That if they were so, then their testimony was sufficient to persuade belief.

I. That the apostles were credible witnesses. Of their knowledge there can be no question, because they gave testimony only of what themselves had seen and heard: so that if they falsified in any

thing, it could not be for want of sufficient knowledge, but for want of fidelity. Now those who heard them, had all the arguments that could be to satisfy them of their fidelity. They delivered things plainly, and without artificial insinuations; they all agreed in their testimony, and were always constant to themselves in the same relation; there was no visible interest to sway them in the least to falsify against their knowledge; they gained nothing by it; nay, so far were they from that, that they run themselves hereby upon the greatest hazards and disadvantages; and, which is the highest evidence that this world can give of any man's sincerity, they ventured their lives for this testimony, and sealed it with their blood. For though martyrdom be no sufficient argument of the truth of that for which a man lays down his life, yet it is a very good argument of a man's sincerity; it signifies that a man is in earnest, and believes himself; and if the thing be not true, yet that he thinks it to be so, otherwise he would not have died for it: so that if we have no reason to doubt of the knowledge of those witnesses, (as certainly we have no reason, the things which they testified being plain matters, what they saw and heard, in which every man knows whether he speaks truth or not; I say, if we have no reason to doubt of their knowledge) we cannot question their integrity and sincerity, having the highest evidence of that which this world can afford; for there cannot be a better argument of the integrity of witnesses, than to lay down their lives for their testimony.

II. If the apostles were credible witnesses, then was their testimony sufficient to persuade belief. For what greater evidence can any man have of

any thing which himself has not seen, than to receive it from credible eye-witnesses; that is, from such persons as we have all the reason in the world to judge worthy of credit? This evidence men are contented to accept in other cases, as sufficient to induce belief; and if we will not accept it in matters of religion, we are very partial and unjust. We find that upon the evidence of credible witnesses men generally proceed with good assurance in human affairs: the chief temporal interests of men, of their estates and reputation, and lives, are determined upon no better evidence than this. Now if in matters of religion we will reject the evidence which shall be sufficient to sway our assent in other things, it is a plain sign that we have less mind to religion than to other things; that we have some interest or pique against it; otherwise we would not refuse to yield an equal assent, where the evidence is equal.

This reason tells us; and our Saviour in effect says the same thing, when he chargeth those who rejected this evidence of credible witnesses with the sin of unbelief: (Mark xvi. 14.) "Afterward he appeared unto the eleven, as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen." But now if the testimony of credible witnesses be not sufficient ground of faith, it could have been no sin in the disciples, not to believe those who had seen Christ risen from the dead.

Secondly, Those who received the doctrine of Christ from the apostles, had not only the testimony of credible witnesses, but they had this testimony confirmed by miracles. Because the apostles

were to go abroad into the world, and to preach to many who never saw nor knew them before, and consequently had no reason at first to believe their testimony, till they were satisfied of the value of the witnesses; and this would require long time and frequent conversation, so that the gospel must have made but a very slow progress at this rate: and because they were like to meet with great opposition from the powers and wits of the world, from the prejudices of education, and from the lusts and interests of men; therefore, for the speedier and more effectual propagation of the gospel, God was pleased to confirm this testimony by miracles, to endue those who were to preach the gospel to the world, with miraculous powers and gifts, of speaking all languages, and healing diseases, and casting out devils; of foretelling things to come, and raising the dead; that, being accompanied with these visible and sensible signs of the Divine presence and power, their testimony might more easily be believed.

And that this was the end of those miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, the Scripture frequently tells us. Hence it is that our Saviour forbade them to preach the gospel abroad, till they were furnished with this power, (Luke xxiv. 49.) "But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." And (Acts i. 8.) our Saviour tells the apostles before his ascension, "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the utmost parts of the earth." This was that which qualified them to be witnesses to Christ, and which gave confirmation to their testimony. So

St. Mark tells us, (Mark xvi. 20.) " And they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." To the same purpose the apostle to the Hebrews, (chap. ii. 3, 4.) speaking of the publishing of the gospel, " How shall we escape, (says he) if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?" What was the confirmation that was given to it? It follows in the next words, " God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." The apostles bare witness of Christ, and God bare witness to them, by those miraculous powers and gifts, that their testimony was true.

Thirdly, Those who received the doctrine of Christ from the apostles, had yet a farther evidence of the divinity of this doctrine, from the wonderful success and prevalency of it, by such improbable and unlikely means. Had the doctrine of Christ's religion been suited to the corruptions of men, and stolen insensibly into the world, and prevailed by degrees in the revolution of many ages, as the heathen superstition and idolatry did, which met with no opposition from the lusts and interests of men, it then had been no strange thing: or had it been planted by power and force of arms, as the religion of Mahomet was, then indeed the success of it had been no argument that it was from God. Had it been set off with all imaginable advantages of wit and eloquence, as the philosophy of the heathens was; and had it been entertained by a few more sublime spirits, and those who were more studious and contemplative, and whose understandings were

elevated above the common pitch, this might have been looked upon but as human and ordinary, and according to the common and usual course of things. But that a doctrine which was so opposite to the lusts and inclinations of men, which was persecuted and opposed by all the powers of the world, and despised and condemned by the witty part of mankind; that a doctrine, the profession whereof did expose men to so many worldly inconveniences, to so many dangers and sufferings, to derision and to death, should be planted by a few mean and inconsiderable men, destitute of all secular power, and advantages of human learning and eloquence; and in so short a time be so vastly propagated, and so generally entertained by all sorts of men, rich and poor, philosophers and illiterate; this was extraordinary, and can be attributed to nothing else but a Divine power accompanying it, and bearing it up against the power and malice of men. That the doctrine of the gospel, delivered to the world by mean persons, with so much simplicity and plainness, should so strangely affect the hearts of men, and be of so admirable a force to stir up and inflame men to piety and virtue, seems to me a very plain argument of its divinity: for we do not find that any doctrine that was merely human, had ever any considerable power upon the minds of men, where it was not set off with the arts of speech and charms of eloquence; and then it only produceth some present motions and heats; but seldom hath any lasting and permanent effect, such as the Christian religion hath had in the world.

Thus I have shewn what assurance those who received the doctrine of the gospel from the apostles were capable of having, concerning the divinity of

this doctrine, and the Divine authority of the persons who declared it to the world.

Thirdly, I am to consider, what assurance after-ages, down to this day, are capable of having concerning this matter: and this principally concerns us who live at the distance of so many ages from the first revelation of the gospel. Of this I shall give you an account in these two particulars:

First, We have an authentic and credible account of this doctrine, and of the confirmation which was in the first ages given to it, transmitted down to us.

Secondly, The effects of this doctrine still remain in the world.

First, We have a credible and authentic account of this doctrine, and of the confirmation which in the first ages was given to it, transmitted down to us. I told you at first, that there are but these three ways whereby we can be assured of matters of fact.

1. By the immediate testimony of our own senses, if we ourselves be present when the thing is done or spoken, and see and hear it.

2. By the testimony of credible eye or ear-witnesses of it. Or,

3. By a credible account or relation of it transmitted to us. And all these ways, in their kind, are accounted sufficient to give men an undoubted assurance of matter of fact. No man doubts of what he himself sees or hears: men generally believe many things which they have not opportunity of seeing themselves, if they be attested to them by credible eye-witnesses: and for things that were done long ago, and which no man now alive was witness of, men are abundantly satisfied by a credi-

ble relation transmitted down to them. Upon this account men do firmly believe, that Alexander about two thousand years ago conquered a great part of the world; and that there was such a person as Julius Cæsar, who seventeen hundred years ago conquered England; and the like. Now if we have the doctrine and history of the gospel, and all the evidences of our Saviour's Divine authority, conveyed down to us, in as credible a manner as any of these ancient matters of fact are, which mankind do most firmly believe, then we have sufficient ground to be assured of it.

Now there are but two ways imaginable whereby the doctrine of Christ's religion and the evidences of its divinity can be conveyed down to us—either by oral report and tradition, or by books and writing. The former of these the experience of the world hath shewn to be very uncertain, and in the succession of many ages liable to great changes and hazard. Hence it is that the prudence of mankind, and the necessity of human affairs, have introduced the latter way of conveying the memory of things to after-ages, namely, by writing and records: and the good God likewise in his wise providence hath taken care, that those who were eye and ear-witnesses of our Saviour's doctrine and life, should commit to writing the history and relation of those matters, that so the memory of them might be preserved to all generations; and these books, which we call the Holy Scriptures, are the authentic records of our religion, without which Christian religion in probability had long since either been strangely corrupted or wholly lost out of the world. For that oral report would not have preserved it, there is this evidence, sufficient to convince any man that is not

obstinately resolved to the contrary—that, of all the persons that formerly lived in the world, and the great actions that have been done, besides what are recorded in history, and of the innumerable miracles of our Saviour, which were not written in the books of the gospel: I say, of all these, oral tradition hath preserved nothing; so that, if the doctrine of the Christian religion, and the history of the life and actions of our Saviour and the apostles, had not been put into a surer way of conveyance than that of oral tradition, in all probability before this time there would have been left no certain monuments of them in the world.

And, that we may understand how much these latter ages are indebted to the wisdom and goodness of God, that he hath furnished us with so fixed and certain a way of being acquainted with his will, with the doctrine and grounds of our religion, I might represent to you what advantages this standing revelation of the Scripture hath above that way of oral tradition; yea, though the revelation of the gospel had been renewed every two or three ages. But this has been done in some former discourses.* I therefore proceed to the other ground of assurance, which the ages after the apostles are capable of having; viz.

Secondly, The effect of this doctrine still remains in the world. Christian religion is still professed in several nations, and is entertained by a considerable part of the world: and allowing for the difference between the extraordinary assistance which at first accompanied the gospel, and was necessary for the planting of it, and the more human and ordinary

* See Sermons CXXVI. and CXXVII. vol. vi. p. 213, &c.

ways whereby it is now propagated, it hath considerable effects upon the hearts and lives of men.

It might justly indeed be expected, considering the reasonableness of the Christian religion, and the great evidence we have of the truth and divinity of it, that it should have a greater force and power upon men, than it hath in most parts of Christendom; but we cannot reasonably expect in a prosperous state of Christianity, those extraordinary heats and fervours which the primitive Christians had whilst they were under continual persecution: we cannot reasonably expect that unity among Christians, and that they should be so generally and universally good, as they were under a state of persecution; for common sufferings have a strange force to unite men, and to endear them to one another: in times of persecution it might be expected that all or most of those who profess themselves Christians, should be really so: when a profession is dangerous to those that make it, and attended with persecutions, then there will be but few pretenders to it; scarce any man will dissemble to the hazard of his life: but when any religion flourisheth, and is prosperous, when it is an odious thing, and against a man's interest, not to profess it, then it may justly be feared that there will be great numbers of hypocrites, of those who, in compliance with the fashion, and the prevailing interest, will take upon them the outward profession of it.

But, however, we see the same effects of Christianity still remain in the world: Christ is still owned as the true Messias and the Son of God; his doctrine acknowledged to be true, and to have been from God; so that thus far his promise hath been made good of "building his church upon a rock," and that "the gates of hell should not prevail

against it." That Christianity hath uninterruptedly continued for above sixteen hundred years, is an additional evidence of the divinity of this doctrine, which the first ages of the world could not have: only this is sadly to be bewailed, that this religion, which hath all imaginable confirmation given to the truth of it, should have no greater effect upon the lives of men; that when we have so much reason to assent to it, yet so few can be persuaded to practise it; that when we make so many solemn professions of our belief of the truth of it, yet, by the actions of our lives, we should so visibly contradict the articles of our belief.

Thus I have gone through the first thing I proposed to be considered in my text, viz. the full and clear evidence which we have of the truth of the gospel, and particularly of the Divine authority of that person who declared the Christian religion to the world. There are two other general heads which the text would lead us to consider, which I shall but briefly treat of, and so conclude this subject.

The second thing considerable in the words is, the cause of the infidelity of men, notwithstanding all the evidence which the gospel carries along with it; which the apostle expresseth in these words: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

In speaking to this, I shall do these four things:

First, Shew why the infidelity of men is attributed to the devil, as the cause of it.

Secondly, Shew more particularly what influence

the devil hath upon the minds of men to keep them in unbelief.

Thirdly, That this doth not excuse the infidelity of men.

Fourthly, Shew the wickedness and unreasonableness of infidelity.

First, Why the infidelity of men is attributed to the devil, as the cause of it. There are two principles that bear sway in the world, and have a more immediate influence upon the mind of man; the Holy Spirit of God, and the devil. The former of these is continually moving and inclining them to good: the latter swaying and tempting them to evil; and these two principles share mankind between them. Hence it is that in Scripture the Spirit of God is said to dwell in good men; and the wicked and vicious part of mankind (whom the Scripture frequently calls the world) are said to be in the possession of the devil, and to belong to his share and lot. Upon this account the devil is called in the text "the god of this world." Accordingly St. John frequently rangeth mankind under these two heads; those that belong to God, and those that belong to the devil, (1 John iii. 8.) "He that committeth sin is of the devil: but he that committeth not sin, is born of God." In the next verse he calleth them the children of God, and the children of the devil: "in this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil." So likewise chap. v. 19. "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." Or, as the words may be rendered more suitably to the opposition which the apostle aims at, "the whole world is subject to the wicked one; we are of God, but the rest of the world is subject to the devil."

Upon this account it is, that in the constant

phrase of Scripture all good motions and inclinations, and all good graces and virtues, are ascribed to the Spirit of God, as the author and worker of them; and all wicked and vicious inclinations, all the sins and vices of men, are attributed to the devil, as in some sort the author and worker of them: and because faith is the root of all other graces and virtues, as infidelity is of sin and wickedness, therefore faith is in a peculiar manner said to be the work of the Holy Ghost; and infidelity the work of the devil. And as the Spirit of God is said "to enlighten the understandings" of men, and "to open their hearts that they may believe:" so the devil is said "to blind the minds of them that believe not." As the Spirit of God is said "to work in them that believe;" so the devil is said "to work in the children of unbelief." (Eph. ii. 2.) He is called "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience," ἀπειθείας, of unbelief. This is one of the principal designs which the devil hath always carried on in the world, to bring men to unbelief, and to keep them in it. As it is the great work of the Spirit of truth "to lead men into truth," and bring them to the belief of it: so the great business of the devil is to seduce men from the truth. Upon this account he is said (John viii. 44.) to be "a murderer from the beginning, because he abode not in the truth;" which refers to the first temptation, whereby he ruined and destroyed our first parents, by seducing them to unbelief; "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?" And because he found this attempt so successful, he still pursues mankind with the same temptation of unbelief.—This for the first; why infidelity is attributed to the devil, as the cause of it.

I come, in the second place, to shew more particularly, what influence the devil hath upon the minds of men, to keep them in unbelief; how, and in what manner "he blinds the minds of them that believe not." These two ways chiefly; by false principles, and by vicious and corrupt habits.

I. By false principles, which, when they have once got possession of the understanding, like so many enemies, they defend it, and hold out against the truth. By this means the devil kept a great part of the Jews and of the heathen world in unbelief; and their minds were so blinded by these false principles which they had entertained, that they could not see "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ." As for the Jews, he had, with a great deal of art, conveyed false principles into them, whereby they were extremely prejudiced against Christ and his doctrine, so that when he, who was "the Desire of all nations," and whom the Jews had looked for, with so longing an expectation, was come, they could "see no beauty in him, wherefore he should be desired." The devil, no doubt, understood very well by the prophecies of the Old Testament, that the Messias was to come, who would give a terrible blow to his kingdom: and therefore, to provide against this storm which he saw coming upon him, he possessed the Jews a great while before with false apprehensions of the Messias, that he was to be a great temporal prince, and to deliver Israel from all their enemies, and to subdue all nations to them; and he played his game so well, that the most learned among the Jews were generally possessed with this apprehension, under the notion of a Divine doctrine, which had been brought down to them by tradition from Moses and the prophets;

so that when the Messias came, and they saw nothing of the outward glory and splendour which they expected, they would not know him, but despised and rejected him as a counterfeit and impostor.

As for the idolatrous gentiles, he had, for many ages together, blinded them with false notions of God and his worship, and with principles of a false philosophy, by which, when they came to measure the doctrine of Christ, the plain truths of the Christian religion seemed foolish and ridiculous to them, and by these prejudices the devil kept many of them, especially of the philosophers, from believing the gospel.

And proportionably in every age, suitably to the temper of it, he endeavours to possess men with false principles, either to keep them in unbelief, or to drive them to it.

II. The second way whereby the devil "blinds the minds of them that believe not," is by vicious and corrupt habits; which, though they do not possess the understanding, yet they have a bad influence upon it; as fumes and vapours from the lower parts of the body affect the head. The vices and lusts of men darken the understanding, and fill the mind with gross and sensual apprehensions of things, and render men unfit to discern those truths that are of a spiritual nature and tendency, and indisposed to receive them. When men's "deeds are evil, they do not love the light," lest it should reprove their vices, "and make them manifest." Truth is offensive and grievous to a corrupt mind, as the light of the sun is to sore eyes. A vicious man is not free to entertain those truths which would check and cross him in his way; he looks upon them as enemies, and therefore thinks himself concerned to

oppose them. Every lust makes a man partial in his judgment, and lays a false bias upon his understanding, which carries it off from truth, and makes it lean towards that side of the question which is most agreeable to the interest of his lusts.

And by this means the devil kept many, both of the Jews and gentiles, in unbelief: he had tempted them to those sins which did indispose them for the receiving of that doctrine which enjoins "the denying of ungodliness and worldly lusts," and chargeth men so strictly with all manner of holiness and purity. The pharisees, under a mask of religion, were guilty of great wickedness and impiety; and the heathens were monstrously degenerated into all manner of vice. So that it was not only the false principles, but likewise the vicious lives of men, which were opposite to the doctrine of the gospel, "and blinded their minds, that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ did not shine unto them."

And the devil still makes use of this means to bring men to infidelity, and keep them in it; as knowing that the shortest way to atheism and infidelity, is to debauch them in their lives. Therefore the apostle seems to give this as the reason of the infidelity of some in his time, (2 Thess. ii. 12.) "That they all may be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." When men once take pleasure in wickedness, then infidelity becomes their interest; for they cannot otherwise defend and excuse a wicked life, but in denying the truth which opposeth it. That man only stands fair for the entertaining of truth, who is under the power of no lust, because he hath nothing to seduce him, and draw him aside in his inquiry after truth; he hath no interest but to find truth: he hath the

indifference of a traveller, who is not inclined to one way more than another, but is only concerned to know the right way. Such indifferency of mind every good man hath; he is ready to receive truth, when sufficient evidence is offered to him, because he is not concerned that the contrary proposition should be true; if a man be addicted to any lust, he is not likely to judge impartially of things: and therefore our Saviour doth with great reason require this disposition to qualify a man for the discerning of truth, (John vii. 17.) "If any man will do God's will, he shall know the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." He that is desirous to do the will of God, he is likely to judge indifferently concerning any doctrine that pretends to be from God: for if there be not good evidence for it, he hath no reason to deceive himself, by entertaining that as from God, which he hath no assurance that it is so: and if there be good evidence for it, he hath no interest to reject it: but if a man be enslaved to any vice or lust, he is not free to judge of those matters which touch upon his interest; but is under a great temptation to infidelity, because he must needs be unwilling to acknowledge the truth of that doctrine which lies so cross to his interest.

Thirdly, This does not excuse the infidelity of men, that the devil is in some sort the cause of it; because he cannot blind our minds, unless we consent to it: he can only suggest false principles to us, but we may choose whether we will entertain them; he can only tempt us to be wicked, he cannot force us to be so whether we will or not: as we may resist the dictates, and quench the blessed motions and suggestions of God's Spirit, and too often

do; so may we "resist the devil," and repel or quench those fiery darts which he casts into our minds, though we do not do it so often as we should. We cannot resist the motions of God's Spirit without injury to ourselves; but we may safely oppose the suggestions of the devil; and we may do it with success, if we sincerely endeavour it. So God hath promised, that if we resist the devil, he shall flee from us: but if we voluntarily consent to his temptations, and suffer ourselves to be blinded by him, the fault is our own, as well as his, and we are guilty of that infidelity which we suffer him to tempt us into. And this will appear, if we consider,

Fourthly, The wickedness and unreasonableness of infidelity. The Scripture every where gives it a bad character, calling it, "an evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living God." Not to believe those revelations of God, which are sufficiently propounded to us, is "an apostacy from the living God," a kind of atheism, and an argument of a very evil temper and disposition. And therefore St. John speaks of infidelity as the highest affront to God imaginable, and as it were a giving God the lie; (1 John v. 10.) "He that believeth not the record which God hath given of his Son," is said to make God a liar.

The greatest and clearest testimonies that ever God gave to any person in the world were to Jesus Christ, and yet how full of infidelity were the Jews, to whom these testimonies were given! They are the great patterns of infidelity, who resisted such immediate evidence; and by the characters which the New Testament gives us of them, we may judge of the evil and unreasonableness of infidelity: and if we consult the history of the New Testament, we shall find infidelity described by such characters

and properties, and accompanied with such qualities, as shew it to be a very evil and unreasonable spirit. The principal of them are these:

1. Monstrous partiality in denying that which had greater evidence than other matters which they did believe.

2. Unreasonable and groundless prejudice.

3. A childish kind of perverseness.

4. Obstinacy and pertinacious persisting in error.

5. Want of patience to consider and examine what can be said for the truth.

6. Rudeness, and boisterous falling into uncivil terms.

7. Fury, and outrageous passion.

8. Infidelity is usually attended with bloody and inhuman persecution. But the treating on these particulars I reserve for another subject.*

The third and last thing contained in the text is, the dangerous state of those who, having the gospel propounded to them, yet do not entertain and believe it; the apostle tells us they are in a lost and perishing condition; "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost."

I say of those who have the gospel propounded to them. As for those to whom the gospel was never offered, they shall not be condemned for their unbelief of it: God will not punish them for not believing the revelation which was never propounded to them, but for sinning against "the law written in their hearts." So the apostle hath stated this matter; (Rom. ii. 12. 14, 15.) they that have a law revealed to them by God, shall "be judged by that law;" but they that are without such a law, shall be "judged without the law, by the law which is writ-

* See the following Sermons, on John iii. 19.

ten in their hearts." Those persons and nations in the world, to whom the gospel was not revealed, shall not be condemned for not believing it; but for sins committed by them against the light of nature, and the law which is written in every man's breast.

But those who have the gospel propounded to them, and yet continue in unbelief, their case is the most dangerous of any persons in the world, whether they be speculative or practical infidels.

1. For speculative infidels (of whom I have been principally speaking) we may guess how great their condemnation shall be, by the greatness of their sin, which I have endeavoured fully to describe to you, with all its aggravations. It is called, (Heb. iii. 12.) "an evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living God," ἐν τῷ ἀποστηναι ἀπὸ Θεοῦ ζῶντος. Infidelity is a kind of "apostacy from God;" it is said to be the giving of God the lie, (1 John v. 10.) "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar;" and we cannot but think that God will severely punish those who put such affronts upon him: it is but equal, that they who resist the clearest light, should "have their portion in utter darkness."

2. For the practical infidels, those who in words acknowledge the gospel to be true, but "in works deny it;" their condition is every whit as bad as the others; nay, I had almost said, that it shall be more tolerable at the day of judgment for the speculative infidel than for them. He who denies the truth of the Christian religion, and lives contrary to the precepts of it, he acts suitably to his principles; but he that owns the truth of the gospel, and lives a wicked life, offers violence to those principles which he hath entertained.

For if we profess ourselves Christians, by this profession we declare to the world, that we believe that the Son of God hath delivered that doctrine to the world which we call the gospel, and hath promised to be "the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him," and hath threatened men with eternal misery in case of disobedience; and that we make not the least doubt, but that both in his promises and threatenings God will be as good as his word: but if in the midst of this profession, we live contrary to the holy precepts of the gospel, in "ungodliness and worldly lusts," in profane swearing, by a trifling and irreverent use of the great and glorious name of God, in the neglect of God, and of the duties of religion, in the profanation of his day, in drunkenness and filthy lusts, in fraud and oppression, in lying and perjury, in wrath and malice, in enmity and uncharitableness one towards another; this very thing, that we have made profession of the gospel, will be an aggravation of our condemnation. Do we think, that, at the day of judgment, we shall escape by pleading this for ourselves, that we believed the gospel, and made profession of it? No, out of our own mouths we shall be condemned; for it seems "we knew our Master's will, and yet did it not;" we were convinced that we ought not to do such things, and yet we did them; we believed the glorious promises of the gospel, and yet we "neglected this great salvation," as a thing not worthy the looking after; we were verily persuaded of the intolerable and endless torments of hell, and yet we would leap into those flames.

Nothing can make more against us, than such an apology as this; our very excuse will be the highest accusation and charge that can be brought against

us, and out of our own confession we shall be condemned.

All that now remains is, to make some application of this discourse which I have made to you concerning the truth of the Christian religion; which I should do in these two particulars,

First, To persuade us to a firm belief of the Christian religion. And,

Secondly, To live according to it. But as to this, I have prevented myself in some former discourses.*

* See Sermons CCXXIII. p. 258, and CCXXVII. p. 328, of the present volume.

SERMON CCXLII.

THE EXCELLENCY AND UNIVERSALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION, WITH THE SIN AND DANGER OF REJECTING IT.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.—JOHN iii. 19.

AT the 16th verse of this chapter our Saviour declares to Nicodemus (who was already convinced by his miracles, that he was "a teacher come from God") the great love and goodness of God to mankind in sending him into the world, to be the Saviour of it; "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Considering the great wickedness of mankind, it might justly have been feared and expected, that God should have sent his Son into the world upon a different errand, to have punished the wickedness of men, and to have destroyed them from off the face of the earth; but he tells us at the 17th verse, that "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that through him the world might be saved;" and that the only way to avoid this condemnation, and to obtain that salvation which God designed for us, is "to believe on him whom God hath sent," (ver. 18.) "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name

of the only-begotten Son of God." He is condemned by this very act of rejecting the Son of God, because he rejects the only way whereby salvation is to be had; and to aggravate the condemnation of such persons, our Saviour here in the text represents himself and his doctrine as "a light come into the world," on purpose to discover to us our sinful and miserable condition, and the way of our recovery out of it, and salvation from it; and those that believe not on him, who do not entertain and welcome this clear and gracious discovery of God's love and goodness to mankind, as doing the absurdest thing imaginable, and making the most preposterous choice, preferring darkness before light: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

In which words there are these six things observable:

First, The description which is here given of our Saviour and his doctrine, they are called a light: "Light is come;" that is, the Son of God preaching the doctrine of life and salvation to men.

Secondly, The universal influence of this light: "Light is come into the world." It is designed for illumination and instruction, not only of a particular place and nation, but of a whole world.

Thirdly, The excellency and advantages of this doctrine above any other doctrine or institution, even that of the Jewish religion, which was likewise immediately from God; they are all but darkness in comparison of it, "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light."

Fourthly, The absurdity and unreasonableness of rejecting the doctrine of the gospel; it is a pre-

ferring darkness before light: "men loved darkness rather than light;" that is, they choose rather to continue in their former ignorance, than to entertain this clear and most perfect discovery of God's will to mankind.

Fifthly, The true reason and account of this absurd choice: "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Sixthly, The great guilt of those who reject the doctrine of the gospel; by this very act of theirs they are condemned, nay, they condemn themselves, because they reject the only means of their salvation: "This is the condemnation," this very thing condemns them, and argues the height of their folly and guilt, that when light is come into the world, they preferred darkness before it. I shall discourse distinctly these particulars.

First, We will consider the description which is here given of our Saviour and his doctrine; they are called light; "Light is come into the world." Light is a metaphor frequently used in Scripture for knowledge, especially for spiritual and Divine knowledge; and those who teach and instruct others are said to be lights. So our Saviour is frequently called "the light of the world," and "the true light;" and his disciples, who were to instruct the world, are called light, "ye are the light of the world;" and the doctrine of our Saviour is likewise called a light, "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ," (2 Cor. iv. 4.) And it is with respect to his doctrine, that he is here said in the text to be a "light come into the world:" which phrase, of coming into the world, does not so immediately refer to his nativity, as to his commission from God; for this phrase of coming into the world, is of the

same importance with that of being sent from God; as (verse 17.) where he says of himself, that "God sent him not into the world to condemn the world;" and here in the text, "this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world," that is, that when God sent his Son on purpose to preach such a doctrine, men should reject it and set it at nought: and in this sense, this phrase, of coming into the world, is I think frequently used in the New Testament, for coming in God's name, upon some message into the world. So chap. iv. 14. some of the Jews being convinced of our Saviour's Divine commission, express it thus; "Of a truth this is that prophet which was to come into the world." So chap. xii. 46. speaking of himself as sent of God, says he, "I am come a light into the world;" he had said just before, "He that seeth me, seeth him that sent me;" and then he adds, "I am a light come into the world." There is one text indeed, where this phrase seems to be taken for "being born into the world;" (chap. i. 9.) "And that was the true light, which enlightens every man that cometh into the world:" but several of the fathers, as St. Cyril and St. Augustine, read this text otherwise, and that with great probability, considering the use of this phrase every where else; I say, they read it thus: "This was the true light, which, coming into the world, enlighteneth every man;" that is, which was sent from God to enlighten all mankind: and so this phrase, of coming into the world, refers not to men's being born into the world, but to our Saviour's being sent from God: and this our Saviour seems to distinguish from his birth: (John xviii. 37.) "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth;" mean-

ing that he was not only born, but commissioned by God for this end.

But enough for the explication of this phrase, the proper importance whereof is not unworthy our knowledge; especially since a sect amongst us build their doctrine of a light within them, and born with them, sufficient to conduct every man to salvation, upon that text I mentioned before, "This was the true light, which enlightens every man that cometh into the world;" for which there is no pretence, if we read it as the original will very well bear it, "This was the true light, which, coming into the world, enlighteneth every man." And so our Saviour says of himself, (chap. xii. 46.) "I who am the light, am come into the world."

But that which I principally intended under this head, is, the unfolding of the metaphor, which runs through the text, that so we may come at the plain sense and meaning of it, namely, why our Saviour, or (which is all one) the doctrine which he preached to the world, is represented to us by light. And here I might tell you that the doctrine of the gospel is called a light, with regard to its cheering and reviving nature; for "light (says Solomon) is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing to the eye to behold the sun:" so the gospel is "glad tidings of great joy." In regard likewise of its purity; as light is the purest of all corporeal beings, so the doctrine of the gospel doth enjoin a greater holiness and purity than any other religion ever did. And (not to be tedious in slight things) in regard of its sudden communication and speedy propagation in the world. As light darts itself from east to west in a moment; so the gospel was propagated with incredible swiftness, and did in a very short space diffuse itself over the

world. Thus I might tell you, that in these, and many more such pretty respects, the doctrine of the gospel is called a light: but I do not love to hunt down a metaphor; for I know very well, that the Scripture (like other authors) useth a metaphor only to one purpose at one time; and though many more similitudes may by fancy be found out, it is certain, but one is intended; which I take notice of on purpose to reprove the vanity and injudiciousness of chasing metaphors farther than ever they were intended: for a metaphor is commonly used to represent to our mind the first and most obvious likeness of things. Thus the doctrine of the gospel is called light, in respect of the clearness of its discovery, it being one of the chief and most obvious properties of light, to discover and make visible itself, and other things. So the apostle tells us, (Ephes. v. 13.) "But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light:" and in this respect and no other, the doctrine of the gospel is here called a light; because it clearly discovers to the world those things which they were either wholly ignorant or uncertain of before; and withal it carries its own evidence along with it, and hath plain characters of its own divinity upon it.

And here I might shew at large these two things:

First, What discoveries the doctrine of the gospel hath made to the world.

Secondly, What evidence it brings along with it of its own divinity, that it is from God.

First, What discoveries the doctrine of the gospel hath made to the world. It hath more clearly discovered,

1. The nature of God, which is the great foundation of religion.

2. Our own sinful and miserable state.

3. The way and means of our remedy and recovery out of it.

4. A more perfect and certain law and rule of life.

5. A more powerful assistance, for the aid and encouragement of our obedience.

6. And lastly, The gospel hath more clearly discovered to us the eternal rewards and punishments of another world, which are the great arguments to obedience and a holy life. I shall go over these as briefly as I can, having elsewhere * treated more largely on some of them.

1. In the doctrine of the gospel we have a clear discovery made to us of the nature of God; which is the great foundation of all religion. For such as men's notions and conceptions of God are, such will their religious worship and services of him be; either worthy of him, and becoming his great and glorious majesty; or vain and superstitious, answerable to the idol of their own imagination: and such will be the actions of their lives; for all men make their God their example, and esteem it an essential piece of religion, to endeavour to be like him. Now the gospel gives us the most true and perfect character of the Divine nature, most agreeable to reason and the wisest and best apprehensions of mankind, such a character as is apt to beget in us the highest love and reverence towards him, and to engage us to the imitation of him, by the constant practice of holiness and virtue; representing him to us as most amiable for his goodness, and most dreadful for his power and justice; describing him to be a pure spirit, which the heathen did not generally believe; and consequently to be wor-

* See Sermon V. vol. i. p. 443.

shipped in such a manner, as is most suitable to his spiritual nature, concerning which the Jews were infinitely mistaken: for God did not command sacrifices to the Jews, and all those external and troublesome observances, because they were most agreeable to his own nature; but because of the grossness of their apprehensions, and the carnality and hardness of their hearts. God did not prescribe this way of worship to them, because it was best; but because the temper of that people, which was so very prone to idolatry, would admit of no other.

The gospel likewise discovers to us more clearly the goodness of God, and his great love to mankind, one of the best and strongest motives in the world to the love of God. The heathen did generally dread God, and look upon him as fierce and revengeful, and therefore they studied by all means to appease him, even by human sacrifices, and offering up their own children to him; and all along in the Old Testament, though there be plain and express declarations of the goodness of God, yet he is generally described as very terrible and severe; but the gospel is full of gracious declarations of God's love and mercy to mankind. In the Old Testament he is usually styled "the Lord of hosts, the great and terrible God;" but in the New Testament, he represents himself in a milder style, "the God of love and peace, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and in him "the Father of mercies, and the God of all patience and consolation." And this difference between the style of the Old and New Testament was so remarkable, that one of the greatest sects in the primitive church (I mean that of the gnostics, which was subdivided into many other sects) did upon this found their heresy of two

principles, or Gods; the one evil, and fierce, and cruel, whom they called the God of the Old Testament; the other kind, and loving, and merciful, whom they called the God of the New.

2. The gospel hath likewise more clearly discovered to us our own sinful and wretched state; that, being made upright, and originally designed by God to live in a holy and happy condition, and endued with sufficient power for that purpose, we, by our wilful transgressions and disobedience of an easy law given to our first parents, are sunk into a wretched state of ignorance and weakness of sin and sorrow, and thereby are become estranged from God, and obnoxious to his wrath and displeasure, and utterly unable to help and recover ourselves out of this sad and miserable state. And this is a great advantage to us, to understand the truth of our condition, and the worst of our case; because a just sense of it will prompt us to seek out for a remedy, and make us ready to embrace it when it is offered to us. And therefore, in the

3. Third place, The gospel hath plainly discovered to us the way and means of our recovery out of this wretched condition; namely, that, in tender commiseration of our miserable and helpless condition, God was pleased to send his Son, his only Son, into the world, to assume our nature, and "to be made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted;" to dwell among us, to converse with us, that he might instruct us in the way to happiness, and lead us therein by the example of his holy life; and that by his death he might be a propitiation for our sins, and purchase the forgiveness of them, and obtain eternal redemption for us. So that here is an adequate and perfect remedy discovered in

the gospel, every way answerable to the weakness and impotency, the degeneracy and guilt, of mankind, "God having laid help upon one that is mighty, and able to save to the utmost all those that come to God by him." He took our nature upon him, and became man, "that he might bring us to God," and, by restoring us to his image and likeness, might repair those woful ruins which sin had made in us; and to obtain the pardon and forgiveness of our sins, "God spared not his own Son, but freely gave him to death for us all; and having raised him from the dead, hath sent him to bless us, in turning us away every one from our iniquity." So that, by this means, the great doubts and fears of mankind, concerning the way of appeasing the offended justice of God, are removed and satisfied. The gospel having given us full assurance, not only that God is reconciled to us, and willing, after all our offences and provocations, to become our friend; but that he hath established the way and means of it; so that "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world." And this is a peculiar advantage of the Christian religion, to assure us of the forgiveness of sins, of the manner how it is procured, and the certain terms upon which it is granted, which neither by the light of nature, nor by any revelation from God, was clearly discovered before.

4. The gospel hath likewise revealed to us a more certain and perfect law and rule of life. It hath fixed our duty, and made it more plain and certain in all the instances of it, than either the light of nature, or the utmost improvement of that light by philosophy, or than the Jewish religion had done

before. It hath cleared our duty in some instances, which the light of nature had left doubtful, or which the subtle disputes of men had made so. It hath heightened our duty in several instances; and those things which had not the clear force of law before, but were only the counsels of wiser men, it hath turned into strict precepts, and made them necessary parts of our duty. It commands universal love, and kindness, and good-will among men, and perfect forgiveness of the greatest injuries and offences; and inculcates these precepts more vehemently, and forbids all malice and revenge more strictly and peremptorily, than any religion or philosophy had done before; as will fully appear to any one who will but attentively read and consider our Saviour's sermon upon the mount.

I cannot now enlarge in giving a particular account of the excellent laws and precepts of our religion, relating to God, our neighbour, and ourselves; I shall only say of them, that they all tend to the perfection of our nature, and the raising of it to the highest pitch of virtue and goodness that we are capable of in this life, and to qualify and dispose us for the felicity of the next; that they every way conduce to the benefit and advantage of particular persons, singly considered, and to the peace and welfare of human society; in a word, they all conspire in the glory of God, and the comfort and happiness of man: and no religion that ever was in the world, nor no philosophy, can shew such a system of moral precepts, in which, as there is nothing vain and faulty, so neither is there any thing defective and wanting; so that St. James doth with great reason call it "a perfect law."

5. The gospel doth also discover and offer to us

a most powerful assistance for the aid and encouragement of our obedience, abundant help and strength to enable us to the performance of all which God requires of us. It offers us wisdom to enlighten our dark minds, and to direct us in doubtful and difficult cases. (James i. 5.) "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Our Saviour hath promised "to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it," to help our weakness, and to raise our courage to strengthen us against the power and force of strong and violent temptations, and to assist us in all our conflicts with our spiritual enemies, and to comfort and support us in all our afflictions and sufferings.

And without this, all the other advantages which our religion affords us would signify little. For what would the knowledge of our sinful and miserable state avail us, without power to rescue ourselves out of it? What is the pardon of our sins past, without strength against them for the future? What would signify the most complete rule of life, and the most perfect pattern of holiness and virtue, without ability in some measure to observe them and live up to them? Without this necessary aid and support, we might despair of resisting the temptations, and mastering the difficulties, of a Christian course, of subduing the power of bad inclinations, and breaking the force of vicious habits, and bearing up against the violence of extreme suffering and persecution for righteousness' sake; without this gracious assistance we can do nothing of all this; and by the help of this we may become, as St. Paul expresses it, "more than conquerors."

6. And lastly, The gospel hath clearly discovered

to us the eternal rewards and punishments of another world, which are the great incentives and arguments to obedience, and a patient and constant continuance in well-doing. The gospel (as the apostle to the Hebrews tells us) is in this respect a better covenant than the law, being established upon better promises, and having the sanction of more severe and terrible threatenings. These great and powerful arguments to keep mankind within the bounds of their duty, which the wisest of the heathen had some doubt of, and which were but very imperfectly revealed to the Jews, are clearly made manifest by the gospel. So the apostle tells us, that "life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel;" and that "therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." And this gives the gospel a mighty power and influence over the minds of men. "Now God commands all men every where to repent," and obey his laws; "because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." The resurrection of Christ from the dead is a sensible demonstration to all mankind of another life after this, and consequently of a future judgment.

I might proceed to shew, in the second place, That as the gospel is a light, in respect of its clear discovery of other things to us, so likewise of itself, and its own Divine authority.

It is a holy and reasonable doctrine, suitable to the highest and best-improved reason of mankind, and plainly tending to our perfection and happiness; both for the sublimity of its mysteries, and the sim-

plicity and excellency of its precepts, every way worthy to have God for its author, and most likely to proceed from him, and from none else. In a word, it is a doctrine in all respects so excellent and perfect, that it is beyond the compass of human understanding to imagine any thing better; and impossible, that any religion, materially differing from this, should be so good. No religion that ever was, or which the wit of man can devise, can give us juster notions of God, a truer account of ourselves, better rules of a good life, and arguments more powerful to persuade us to goodness, than the Christian religion hath done. And the intrinsic goodness and excellency of any religion, goes half way in the proof of its Divinity; to which, if God be pleased to add the external confirmation of plain and unquestionable miracles, it amounts to a full demonstration, and hath all the evidence that it is possible for any religion to have, that it is from God.

But this is a very large argument, which I have handled in some other discourses.* All therefore that I shall at present add, is an inference or two from what I have been discoursing upon this argument, suited to the solemnity of this season.†

I. We should welcome this light which is come into the world with all possible expressions of joy and thankfulness. The doctrine of the gospel is the most glorious light that ever shone upon the world, the best news that ever arrived to mankind. Light is a cheerful thing; "The light of the eyes (says Solomon) rejoiceth the heart, and good news

* See Sermons CCXXVIII. CCXXIX. CCXXX. p. 347, &c. and the preceding Sermons, in this volume.

† Preached on Christmas-day.

maketh the bones fat." When the angel brought the news of our Saviour's birth to the shepherds, with what joy does he relate it to them! (Luke ii. 10, 11.) "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." And (Matt. ii. 10.) when the wise men saw the star, which pointed at the place of his birth, and conducted them to it, it is said, "they rejoiced with great joy."

And whenever we commemorate the breaking in of this glorious light upon the world, I mean the birth of our blessed Saviour, how should our hearts be filled with joy, and our mouths with praises! We should every one of us break out into that hymn of the blessed mother of our Lord, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour," for he hath regarded me and all mankind in our low estate. He was pleased to come down from heaven to save us from hell; and to become man, that he might "bring us to God;" and was contented to be miserable, that he might make us happy; and he did declare this mighty affection to us, when we were not only unworthy of his love, but even beneath the consideration and regard of his pity; for what is man, that God should be thus mindful of him, or the son of man, that the Son of God should visit him? that he should condescend to inhabit our nature, and "to dwell among us?" All mankind may with equal or greater reason say, as the centurion once did to him, "Lord, we are not worthy that thou shouldst come under our roof." What means this amazing condescension, that thou shouldst leave thy glory, to be thus obscured, and come from God, to be

" despised and rejected of men;" and quit the regions of bliss and happiness, to become " a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief!" Was it for us that thou didst all this? Yea, for our sakes, who never had done any thing for thine, who may be ashamed to remember, that we were grievous sinners, and bitter enemies to thee, when all this was done for us.

Thus we should celebrate the memory of this blessed season, and as often as the year returns, with great joy and thankfulness commemorate the great blessings which this day brought to the world, and say with David, " This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will be glad and rejoice therein." Abraham and David saw this day, but far off; and yet they rejoiced: how should we then be transported with joy, to whom this day is come, and upon whom the Sun of righteousness is long since risen, with healing and salvation under his wings!

II. Let us " walk in this light." This expression the Scripture useth to signify what use we should make of the advantages and opportunities which, by the glorious light of the gospel, are afforded to us, (John xii. 35.) " Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you." (Ephes. v. 8.) " For ye were sometimes darkness: but now are ye light in the Lord: walk therefore as children of the light." (Rom. xiii. 11—14.) " It is now high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness,

not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

This counsel is proper for Christians at all times, who live under the light of the gospel; but more especially at this time, when we commemorate the coming of this light into the world. Nothing can be more unsuitable and contrary to it, than works of darkness, I mean sin and wickedness, and those abominable vices, which too many are apt to indulge themselves in at this time, more especially such as the apostle names in the text just now mentioned, "rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness, contention and quarrelling." We should at this time more especially put off those vices, and "put on the Lord Jesus Christ;" that is, be clothed with all those graces and virtues, which, in the precepts of his religion, and the example of his life, he hath recommended to us. This is the time when the "Word was made flesh," and put on our nature; and what return can be more proper for us at this season, than "to put on the Lord Jesus; and to make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof?"

Nay, at this time we should retrench more than usual from our excess and superfluity, both because of the crying necessities of the poor, who are very numerous, and likewise for the relief of our distressed and persecuted brethren, who are fled to us for shelter from the barbarous rage of their persecutors. What we would have done for the honour of Christ at another time, let us now do for the relief of his members; and whatever kindness we shew to them, he will take it as done to himself. We have great cause to be cheerful at this time, and we may testify

our joy by feasting, or any other lawful expressions of it: but we must not so feast, as to forget the affliction of Joseph, and not to remember that we also are in the body, and liable to the same sufferings. We must therefore take heed, that our table do not become "a snare to us;" and that our mirth do not degenerate into sensuality and sin.

Every Christian hath so many arguments against sin, that we should abstain from it at all times: but of all other times we should be most ashamed to be guilty of any lewdness and wickedness when we are remembering "the appearance of the Son of God, to bring salvation to us, and to teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

To conclude: let us by all that hath been said be persuaded so to celebrate the memory of Christ's first coming, to "take away sin by the sacrifice of himself," that we may with comfort and joy "wait for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, when he shall appear a second time, without sin unto salvation."

SERMON CCXLIII.

THE EXCELLENCY AND UNIVERSALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION, WITH THE SIN AND DANGER OF REJECTING IT.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.—JOHN iii. 19.

IN discoursing on these words, I have already considered the first thing observable in them, viz. The description which is here given of our Saviour and his doctrine; they are called a light: "Light is come," that is, the Son of God, bringing the doctrine and knowledge of salvation to the world; it being one of the first and most obvious properties of light to discover and make visible itself and other things: "That which makes all things manifest is light;" and accordingly I have observed, that the Christian religion hath made a clear discovery to us of many great and important things, of which the world was either ignorant or doubtful before: and likewise that it brought great evidence along with it of its own divinity, and that it was from God.

I proceed now to the second thing observable in the text, viz. The universal influence of this light: "Light is come into the world." The doctrine of the gospel was designed for the illumination and instruction, not of one particular place and nation, but of the whole world. Thus our Saviour and his

doctrine are described by old Simeon, (Luke ii. 30—32.) "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." To the gentiles, who were before in darkness, he is said to be a light: but to the Jews, who had the light of Divine revelation in some degree before, he is said to be a glory; that is, a brighter and more glorious light; "A light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." And (John i. 9.) he is called "the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," that is, which was sent into the world for the illumination of all mankind. And (John viii. 12.) he says of himself, "I am the light of the world."

Now that the revelation of the gospel by Jesus Christ was designed for the whole world, for the instruction, and comfort, and benefit of all mankind, I shall endeavour to make out by these three steps:

I. In that it is very credible, that God would some time or other make such a revelation of his will, as might be sufficient to direct and bring mankind to happiness.

II. That before the revelation of the gospel by Jesus Christ, no such general and universal declaration of God's will had been made to the world.

III. That the revelation of the gospel hath all the marks and characters of an universal revelation, and was certainly by God designed for that purpose.

I. It is very credible, that God would some time or other, when his infinite wisdom and goodness should think it most fit and seasonable, make such a revelation of his will to the world, as might be sufficient to direct and bring mankind to happiness.

The consideration of the Divine goodness is very apt to induce such a persuasion; for what more reasonable to believe concerning God, than that he, who is good to all, and the common Father of all mankind, not the God of the Jews only, but the God of the gentiles also (as St. Paul argues to this purpose, in his Epistle to the Romans,) should some time or other, in pity and compassion of the ignorant and degenerate and helpless condition of mankind, provide some universal remedy, by such a general revelation of his will, as was every way fitted and calculated to be of universal use and benefit to direct all men in the way to happiness, and if they be not wanting to themselves to bring them to it; that, in the doubtings and uncertainties of mankind concerning the will of God, and the rule of their duty, he should give an universal law, equally obliging all men, to be a perfect and standing rule and measure of their duty in all times and places, and which should never stand in need of any addition, amendment, or alteration.

For why should we think that God, who is so equally related to us all, should confine the effects of his goodness to a few persons, or a small part of mankind, to one particular family or nation? That he, whose bounty is so equal and unconfined in the disposing of temporal blessings, should be so partial and narrow in the bestowing of his greatest and best gifts, those spiritual blessings which concern our souls, and our happiness to all eternity? How can we in reason imagine, that he who "causeth the sun to rise, and his rain to fall," upon the whole world, should vouchsafe that great and most glorious light of his Divine and heavenly truth only to a few, and shower down his spiritual blessings

upon a small part of the earth, leaving all the rest of the world a wilderness, and a land of darkness? Thus to think of God is no ways agreeable to those large apprehensions which mankind have always had of the goodness of God, by no means honourable to the Divine nature; and therefore it is most highly probable, that God should one time or other make such a revelation of his will to mankind, as is of universal concernment and advantage.

II. I shall shew that before the revelation of the gospel by Jesus Christ, no such general and universal declaration of God's will had been made to the world. All the revelations which God had made to men before, were either made to some particular persons upon particular occasions, or to one particular nation and people, I mean that of the Jews. Those which were made to particular persons were so narrow and limited, and of so private concernment, that they signified nothing to the generality of mankind; nor could the knowledge of them, with any degree of evidence, have been propagated. As for that revelation which was made to the Jews, it was, both in its nature and design, and in all the circumstances of it, plainly limited to one particular place and nation. And as God discovered no intention, so neither were there any proper means and endeavours used to proclaim and propagate it, as an universal law and institution obligatory to all mankind.

From the nature and all the circumstances of the Jewish law, it clearly appears to have been designed for a municipal law and constitution, for the governing of one particular people and nation, within a certain territory and spot of ground, to which a great part of the precepts of it is peculiarly limited,

and could be exercised and practised no where else; and not intended to take in and oblige all the nations of the earth. For when this law was first given, God plainly directs it to the people of Israel, beginning it in this form of words, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God;" and "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage;" and he frequently tells them, that he had separated them from all the people upon the face of the earth, to be a peculiar people to himself; to be governed by peculiar civil laws, and by a particular way of religious worship: for which reason the apostle calls the Jewish law and religion "a wall of partition," which did separate and divide them from all other people; so that even towards the strangers that lived among them, they were not bound in several cases to observe the same laws towards them which they were obliged strictly to observe towards their brethren; as in the case of usury, and remitting debts, and releasing of servants.

Besides that, a great part of their religion was confined to a particular place, which God should appoint, and which at last by his appointment was fixed to the temple at Jerusalem, to which they were obliged to resort thrice every year; which it was impossible for other nations to do. Not to mention that the great promises and threatenings of that law were, of plenty and prosperity, or of famine and affliction in that land. To all which we may add, that a great part of the laws and ordinances of that religion, was peculiarly fitted and suited to the genius and inclination of that people, and made in condescension to their capacities and prejudices, to the obstinacy and hardness of their hearts.

It is very clear, likewise, that God did not design to spread and propagate this law any farther than that people; since no means were appointed by him, no endeavours were used, to that end: no apostles and prophets were sent forth to proclaim and publish this law to other nations; nay, the providence of God seems rather purposely to have designed to conceal them and their law, till the time drew near of God's revealing to the world a more perfect institution, which should have its rise and beginning there, and from thence be published over the world, according to that of the prophet, that "the law should come out of Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem:" but the law which was given by Moses to the Jews was, for many ages in a great measure concealed from the rest of the world. So the Psalmist tells us, (Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20.) "He sheweth his word unto Jacob; his statutes and judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments, they have not known them." Nay, on the contrary, God had provided, by several strict and severe laws, that the people of Israel should have as little commerce and conversation as was possible with other nations; a plain sign he never intended their religion to be propagated among them: but this is so manifest from the nature of the Jewish religion, and all the circumstances of its constitution, that I need not to labour any farther in the proof of it. I proceed therefore to shew, in the

III. Third and last place, That the revelation of the gospel hath all the marks and characters of an universal revelation, and was certainly designed by God for that end. And this will clearly appear, by considering these four things:—

1. The person by whom God was pleased to make this revelation to the world.

2. The nature and design of it.

3. The prophecies and predictions concerning it. And,

4. The remarkable countenance and assistance which were given from heaven to the first publishers of it.

1. If we consider the person by whom God was pleased to make this revelation to the world, we cannot think that God had any less design therein, than the recovery and reformation of mankind. Now the person employed by God to make this revelation of his will, was the eternal and only-begotten Son of God, assuming our nature and appearing in it; I say, the eternal and only-begotten Son of God. So the apostle to the Hebrews describes him, and thereby distinguisheth him from all the former prophets, by whom, in former ages, God had made particular revelations of himself to men: (Heb. i. 1—3.) "God, who at sundry times (or by several parts and degrees), and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds: who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power." What a character is here of the greatest and most glorious person that ever was employed to men! a messenger of God to man; and who so fit as the Son of God, who came from the bosom of his Father, to reveal his will to all mankind? Who so proper as he, who made the world, and upholds and preserves it, to be sent upon so great an errand, as the recovery

and salvation of the whole world? And, on the contrary, who so unfit, as this great and glorious person, to be employed in any less and lower design, than that which was of general concernment to the benefit and happiness of all mankind? So great an ambassador was not fit to be sent to treat of any thing less than an universal peace, and the reconciliation of the whole world.

And then, if we consider him as assuming human nature, and thereby equally related to all mankind, it was fit he should be concerned for that whole race of creatures to whom he had so nearly allied himself, and whose nature he had vouchsafed to assume. It became him, who became man, to shew himself a lover of mankind, to reveal the will of God, and the way to happiness, to all men, to be an universal teacher and lawgiver; that by the direction and doctrine, and the obedience of his laws, "all men might come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved."

2. If we consider the nature of this revelation, it will appear to be designed for the general use and benefit of mankind. The matters revealed, whether concerning God or ourselves, this world or the other, are of universal concernment. The laws of this religion are not calculated for any particular place or nation, one more than another; and the arguments and encouragements to the obedience of these laws, are equally fitted to work upon all capacities and conditions, and apt to affect them alike, because they equally touch the interests and concernments of all men: for since all men are equal in the immortal duration of their souls, and equally obnoxious to the judgment of God in another world, it concerns all men alike to understand their duty,

and the way to gain the favour of God, and thereby to escape the endless and intolerable miseries, and to obtain the unspeakable and everlasting happiness, of another world: and to direct, and excite men hereto, the whole revelation of the gospel, and the doctrines, and all the laws of it, do plainly tend. There is nothing in the Christian religion but what is fit for all men to know and practise, in order to their present peace and comfort, and their future and eternal happiness; and these things surely are of universal and equal concernment to mankind.

3. The predictions and prophecies concerning the Messias, and the doctrine which should be delivered to the world, do plainly shew, that this revelation should be universal. In the first promise to Abraham, it is plainly foretold, that in his seed, that is, as the Jews always understood it, in the Messias, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. And there are innumerable predictions in the prophets of the Old Testament to this purpose. I shall mention but a few of many: (Psal. ii. 8.) "Ask of me, (saith God to his Son) and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Psal. lxxii. 17. speaking of the Messias, "Men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him Blessed." (Isa. xlix. 6.) "I will give thee (says God there concerning him) for a light to lighten the gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth."

4. And lastly, This revelation was actually published to the world, God giving remarkable countenance and assistance from heaven to the first preachers and publishers of it.

The apostles of our Lord and Saviour, in virtue of his commission, and by his express command

just before his ascension, went forth and published his doctrine to the world. Having, upon the day of Pentecost, according to his promise which he made to them before his death, and renewed to them after his resurrection, when he was going to his Father; I say, having, according to his express promise, received the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, they began to publish the gospel first to the Jews; and, being rejected by the greatest part of them, they preached it to the gentiles; and as a confirmation of the doctrine which they preached, they witnessed the resurrection of Christ from the dead, as the great evidence of the truth of his doctrine; and to give confirmation to this testimony, God enabled them to work miracles, and particularly to raise the dead to life, which was a confirmation of their testimony beyond all exception: and in order to the more speedy and effectual propagation of this doctrine, God was pleased to work a strange miracle never wrought upon any occasion before or since; he endowed the apostles and first preachers of Christianity with a power of speaking all languages, which they had occasion in their travels to make use of, without ever having studied or learned them; and this miraculous gift was common to all the apostles, and continued till the gospel was published by them in most parts of the then known world; greater evidence than which God cannot be imagined to give of his design to communicate the knowledge of this doctrine universally, and to all nations: and if it was rejected in some places, and the progress of it obstructed in others, this doth not hinder but that God designed it to be universally known, and that it is of its own nature fit to be a law to all mankind; and God, who, in his secret

counsel, hath not thought fit as yet to grant the knowledge of this doctrine of salvation to some parts of the world, may in his due time send this light into those dark places of the earth, which are full of the habitations of barbarousness and cruelty, and grant the knowledge of salvation to them. In the mean time, what cause have we to bless God, to whom this light came so soon, and who have enjoyed it so long! "Let us walk in the light, while we have it, lest darkness overtake us."

And thus much may suffice to have been spoken of the second particular which I observed in the text, namely, the universal influence of this light; "light is come into the world."

I proceed to speak briefly to the third particular I mentioned, viz. the excellency and advantages of this doctrine of the Christian religion, above any other doctrine or institution, even that of the Jewish religion, which was likewise immediately from God. They are all but darkness in comparison of it. "Light is come into the world." But in this I have in a great measure prevented myself, in what I have already discoursed upon the two former heads, and therefore I shall say the less upon it: for by what I have already said, it will in good measure appear, how obscure and imperfect the discoveries both of natural light, and of the Jewish religion were, in comparison of the bright revelation of the gospel; and that, both concerning the nature of God, and the worship which is most suitable and acceptable to him; and likewise concerning the rule of our duty, and the rewards and punishments of another life, which are the great motives and arguments to obedience; and which, as to the greatest part of mankind, both Jews and gentiles, had but a

very weak and faint influence before. And how could it well be otherwise, since the apprehensions of mankind concerning these things were dark and doubtful!

What gross and imperfect notions the heathens had concerning God, we may judge by their universal and abominable idolatry. How uncertain their morality was (which yet was the best part of heathenism) we may see by their endless differences and disputes concerning moral duties. How wavering they were concerning the immortality of souls, and the rewards of another world, we may judge by the different and contrary opinions of the greatest philosophers about these points. So that heathenism was plainly defective, both in the knowledge of God, which is the great foundation of all religion, and the precepts of a good life, which are the rule of it; and the assurance of immortality, which is the great motive to religion, and the only solid comfort and support of the mind of man under the evils and afflictions of life, and against the fears of death.

And the Jewish religion, likewise, though it had manifold advantages of paganism, yet was it very short and imperfect in many of these respects which I have mentioned: besides that, it gave no clear and well-grounded assurance of the pardon and forgiveness of sins; and the rewards of another world were very obscurely revealed under that dispensation. So that well might the apostle, upon comparison of the law and the gospel, say, "The law made nothing perfect: but the bringing in of a better hope did."

And as for the evidence which those religions had, paganism pretended to no other authority for their idolatrous worship, but the long custom and prac-

tice of the world. This Symmachus, the heathen, insists upon, instead of all other arguments: *Sequimur majores nostros, qui feliciter secuti sunt suos:* "We follow our forefathers, who happily followed theirs."

The Jewish religion, indeed, produced good evidence that it was from God; but it is very destitute of arguments to prove, that it was either an universal, or perfect, or final revelation of God's will to mankind; nay, it was expressly said in their law, that God would raise up another prophet among them, to whom they were to hearken, and to be obedient in all things. The Messias was plainly foretold, and spoken of, both in the law and the prophets, as one that was to be the author of a more perfect law and institution, which in due time was to be revealed to the whole world, "to be a light to lighten the gentiles," as well as to be the glory of the people of Israel: and accordingly, "in the fulness of time," he came, and by a greater confirmation of miracles, than the Jewish religion had, he put a period to that weak and imperfect institution; and to shew that the law of Moses was at an end, God hath now, for above sixteen hundred years, taken away their place and nation, destroyed their temple, and laid waste their country, and dispersed them over the world; so that they are not capable of observing a great part of their religion. By all which it appears, that whatever was in the world before, was but darkness, in comparison of the glorious light of the gospel; so that well might our evangelist say, "This light was the true light, which coming into the world, enlightens every man:" "the true light," by way of excellency and eminency; as our Saviour calls himself "the true bread which

came down from heaven," so the doctrine of the gospel is called "the true light," in opposition to those false or imperfect lights which were in the world before. This doctrine of the Christian religion is a perfect, and therefore a final discovery of the will of God to man; because it can receive no amendment, therefore it shall never have any change or alteration.

I will conclude this particular with that inference which the apostle to the Hebrews makes, from the consideration of the perfection and unchangeableness of the gospel dispensation, which he calls "a kingdom which cannot be shaken:" (Heb. xii. 28, 29.) "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be removed, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire." The better, and more perfect, and more unchangeable, our religion is, the better we should be; the more steadfastly should we persist in the sincere profession and practice of it: and if we do not, the heavier will be our condemnation; "for our God is a consuming fire." I proceed to the

Fourth particular observable in the text, viz. The great unreasonableness of rejecting this doctrine of the gospel. It is to make the absurdest judgment and choice possible, to prefer darkness before light. "Men loved darkness rather than light;" that is, they chose rather to continue in their former ignorance, than to entertain the most clear and perfect discovery of God's will to mankind. And what can be more absurd and unreasonable, when the difference is so palpable, and the choice so plain? That man is blind that cannot distinguish light from darkness; and he is very perverse and

obstinate, who, seeing the difference between them, will choose darkness rather than light. Such was the unreasonableness of those who rejected the gospel when it was revealed to the world; since nothing is more clear to an impartial and considerate man, than that the Christian religion is the best and most perfect institution, of the greatest and most universal concernment to mankind, that ever was revealed to men; and our blessed Saviour, who was the author and founder of this religion, gave greater evidence that he came from God, than any other prophet or teacher that ever was; and the worship of God which this religion prescribes, is most agreeable to his nature, being a spiritual and a reasonable service, fit for men to give, and for God to accept. In a word, the precepts of the gospel are more excellent in themselves, and better calculated for the happiness and perfection of human nature; and the motives and arguments to persuade men to the obedience of these precepts, more powerful than those of any other religion that ever yet appeared in the world.

So that the difference between the Christian religion and all others that have been received and professed in the world, is so plain and apparent, that nothing but passion, or prejudice, or interest, or some other faulty principle, can hinder any man from yielding his assent to Christianity. The comparison is almost equal to that betwixt light and darkness; and therefore, our Saviour had great reason to speak so very severely of the infidelity of the Jews, who rejected such a doctrine, propounded to them with so much evidence and advantage. And because the Jews are the great Scripture pattern of perverse infidelity and opposition to the

truth, it will not be amiss to take our estimate and measure of the unreasonableness of this spirit and temper from the properties and characters which we find of it in the Jews, most of which do still inseparably accompany the spirit of infidelity wherever it is; that as face answers face in water, so does the infidelity of this present age resemble that of the Jews in our Saviour's time, in all those perverse and unreasonable qualities which did then attend them; and therefore I shall take notice of some of the chief of them, as I find them dispersed up and down in the history of the New Testament.

But this, and what remains to be said upon this argument, I must reserve for another discourse.

SERMON CCXLIV.

THE EXCELLENCY AND UNIVERSALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION, WITH THE SIN AND DANGER OF REJECTING IT.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.—JOHN iii. 19.

WHEN I began to discourse on these words, I observed in them several particulars. As,

First, The description which is here given of our Saviour and his doctrine, by the metaphor of light. "Light is come."

Secondly, The universal influence of this light. "Light is come into the world."

Thirdly, The excellency and advantages of the doctrine of the gospel, above any other doctrine or institution, even that of the Jewish religion, which was likewise immediately from God. They are all but darkness, in comparison with this: "Light is come into the world; and men loved darkness."

These three I have dispatched, and have entered upon the fourth particular observable in my text; namely,

The great unreasonableness of rejecting this doctrine of the gospel. It is to make the absurdest judgment and choice that is possible, to prefer darkness before light. "Men loved darkness rather than light." The difference between the Christian religion and all others is so very plain, that our Saviour had great reason to speak thus severely of the

infidelity of the Jews. And because the Jews are the great Scripture pattern of perverse infidelity, I proposed the taking an estimate of the unreasonableness of this spirit and temper, from the characters which we find of it in that people, most of which do still inseparably attend the spirit of infidelity, wherever it is. I shall therefore take notice of some of the chief of those characters, as I find them dispersed up and down in the history of the New Testament; and they are these which follow :—

I. Monstrous partiality, in denying and rejecting that revelation, which had not only as great, but greater evidence, than other things which they did believe, and were ready enough to entertain. They believed Moses and the prophets: and the great confirmation which was given to them, was by the miracles which God wrought by them. Those miracles they did not see themselves, but received them from the testimony of their forefathers, being brought down to them by a very credible and uncontrolled revelation, which they had no reason to doubt of the truth of; but they themselves saw the miracles which our Saviour wrought, which were more and greater than the miracles of Moses and all the prophets, so that they were eye-witnesses of that Divine power which accompanied our Saviour; and yet they rejected him and his doctrine: nay, so unequally did they deal with him, that, after they had rejected him, notwithstanding all the evidence which he gave that he came from God, they greedily received and ran after false prophets who gave no such testimony. So our Saviour foretells concerning them, (John v. 43.) and so afterwards it came to pass, "I am come (saith he) in my Father's name," that is, have given sufficient evidence that he sent me,

and "ye received me not; if another shall come in his own name, him will ye receive."—"In his own name," that is, without any miracles to prove that he comes from God.

And to shew their horrible partiality yet more, after they had refused the clearest testimony that God could give of him, they were contented to accept of the disagreeing testimony of two witnesses against him, and upon that uncertain evidence to put him to death.

And this hath been the temper of those that oppose the truth, in all ages, and in all kind of matters. Thus the church of Rome will needs understand those words of our Saviour, "This is my body," in the sense of transubstantiation, contrary to the plain intention of them, and in contradiction to the reason and senses of all mankind; and yet they will not understand the plain institution of the sacrament in both kinds. And thus the atheists, who will not believe that there is a God, who made the world, can yet swallow things ten times harder to be believed; as, that either the world was eternal of itself, or the matter of it; and that the parts of this matter, being in perpetual motion, did, after infinite trials and attempts, at last happen to settle in this order in which we now are; that is, that this admirable frame of the world, which hath all the characters upon it of deep wisdom and contrivance, was made merely by chance, and without direction and design of any intelligent author: so partial is infidelity, as to assent to the most absurd things, rather than believe the revelations of God, or to own those principles, which are naturally imprinted upon the minds of men, and have the general consent of mankind.

II. Another usual concomitant of infidelity is, unreasonable and groundless prejudice. The Jews were strangely prejudiced against our Saviour, and that upon the weakest and slightest ground; as, that his original was known amongst them. (John vii. 27.) "Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is." Surely they were very ready to take exceptions against him, that would urge this for an objection; for what if his original were known, might he not be from God for all that? Moses was a great prophet, and yet it was very well known from whence he was; and it was no where said in the Old Testament that his original should be unknown; nay, on the contrary, it was plainly declared, that he was to be of the tribe of Judah, of the lineage of David, and to come out of Bethlehem.

Another prejudice against him was the meanness of his parents, and of the manner of his education. (Matt. xiii. 54.) "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him." And so, likewise, (John vii. 15.) "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" A strange kind of unreasonable prejudice! They could not believe him to be an extraordinary person, because his parents and relations, his birth and manner of breeding, were so mean; because he had been brought up to a trade, and not bred up like one of their scribes and rabbies; as if God could not inspire a man with all those gifts, which men ordinarily acquire by study

and pains: and as if it had not been reasonable to expect, that the Messias, who they believed was to be the greatest prophet that ever was, should be thus inspired. Now in all reason the argument is strong the other way—that sure he was an extraordinary prophet, who all on a sudden gave such evidence of his great knowledge and wisdom, and did such mighty works; because this could not be imputed to his breeding and education, since that was so mean, and therefore there must be something extraordinary and divine in it; thus another man, who had been free from prejudice, would have been apt to reason.

Another unreasonable prejudice was grounded upon a spiteful and malicious proverb, concerning the country where our Saviour was brought up, namely Galilee, (John i. 46.) "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" And, (John vii. 41.) "Shall Christ (that is, the Messias,) come out of Galilee?" And, (ver. 52.) "Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." Nathanael, indeed, who was a sincere good man, was easily wrought off from this prejudice, and was contented to be convinced of the contrary by plain evidence, when Philip desired him "to come and see." (John i. 46.) But the Jews it seems laid great weight upon it, as if this one thing had been enough to confute all our Saviour's miracles, and, after they had shot this bolt at him, the matter had been clearly concluded against him.

But wise and unprejudiced men do not use to be swayed and carried away with ill-natured proverbs; nor do they believe the bad characters which are given of a country, to be universally true without exception, as if every country did not yield some brave spirits, and excellent persons, whatever the

general temper and disposition of the inhabitants may be observed to be; or as if a man could not be an inspired prophet, unless he were bred in a good air; nor be sent by God, unless men approved the place from whence he came. The Bœotians among the Greeks were a heavy and dull people, even to a proverb; and yet Pindar, a great poet and wit, was born in that country. The Scythians were so barbarous, that one would have thought surely no good could come from thence; and yet they yielded Anacharsis, none of the meanest of the philosophers. The Idumeans were "aliens and strangers from the commonwealth of Israel;" and yet Job, one of the most excellent persons that ever lived, was born among them. God can bring forth eminent instruments out of any place and nation he pleases, "out of stones raise up children unto Abraham." Our conceits are no rule to him, nor does he govern the world by our foolish proverbs; "His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts."

And thus some in our days have endeavoured to slur the Reformation, by calling it "the northern heresy;" as if the light of truth were at as great a distance from these northern parts, as that of the sun, and nothing but error and heresy could come thence; which is just such a conceit, and grounded upon as wise a reason, as that of the Donatists, who would needs have truth and the catholic church confined to Africa, because that was the southern part of the world, and because it is said in the Song of Solomon, concerning the church, "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, and where thou makest thy flocks to rest at noon."

Another mighty prejudice against our Saviour we find mentioned John vii. 48. "Have any of the

rulers or pharisees believed on him?" For this there seems to be some better colour than for the other; because the example of superiors and of persons thought to be more knowing, is considerable indeed in a doubtful case, and a good rule of action, when we have no better; but ought to be of no force to sway our judgment against clear and convincing evidence. Zedekiah and the princes of Judah would not hearken to Jeremiah: yet was he a true prophet for all that, though it was not their pleasure to think so. Sometimes there is a gross and palpable corruption in those who ought to be guides to others, and they have a visible interest in opposing and rejecting the truth. And this was the case of the pharisees and rulers among the Jews in our Saviour's time. Any one that had known them, and judged impartially concerning them, would rather have chosen to have followed any example than theirs. Religion may sometimes be in greatest danger, from those who ought to understand it best, and to be the greatest supports of it. So it was of old among the Jews, when the prophet complains, that "their leaders had caused them to err:" and so it hath been among Christians, in the great degeneracy of the Roman church; their popes and their general councils, as they call them, have been the great corrupters of Christianity, and seducers of Christendom; which made Luther to say, with truth and sharpness enough, *Religio nunquam magis periclitatur quam inter reverendissimos;* "Religion is never in greater danger than among the most reverend;" meaning the pope and the cardinals: when those who ought to teach and reform others, are guilty of the greatest errors and corruptions themselves.

I will mention but one prejudice more, which we find John ix. 16. "This man (say the Jews con-

cerning our Saviour) is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath-day." This indeed had been a considerable exception, if it had been true; and therefore our Saviour takes great care to vindicate himself from this aspersion; he shews, that the law of the sabbath did not oblige in all cases, and that, being a positive precept, it ought to give place to moral duties, which are of perpetual obligation, and therefore he bids them "go and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" and the plain meaning of that saying was, that when positive institutions interfere with any moral duty, they cease to oblige in that case; that the sabbath was designed for the ease and benefit of men, and not for their grievance and burden: and therefore, where the life of man is concerned, the law of the sabbath ceaseth; as in case of necessity, "David did eat of the show-bread, and was blameless," though by a positive law it was forbidden for any man to eat of it but the priests only. Lastly, from a general practice in a common case among themselves, it being allowed by their own law, to take an ox or an ass out of a pit on the sabbath-day; and therefore much more to heal one on the sabbath-day and "to loose a daughter of Abraham, that had been bound eighteen years," as our Saviour invincibly argues.

Upon the like prejudice several churches and communions in the world will not allow others to be good Christians, and in a state of salvation, because they do not lay the same weight that they do upon positive institutions, not of Divine, but of mere ecclesiastical authority, in which they are more unreasonable than the Jews.* But I proceed to a

* Of this see more, Sermons CXVI. CXVII. and CXVIII. vols. v. and vi.

III. Third concomitant of their infidelity, and this was, a childish kind of perverseness. Being strongly prejudiced against our Saviour, they were so peevish and froward, that nothing would satisfy them. And of this he himself gives us a remarkable instance; (Matt. xi. 16, 17.) "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." The business was this: the Jews found fault with John the Baptist, because his habit and conversation were so rough and severe; and yet our Saviour could not please them neither, who was of a quite different temper. "John the Baptist came in the way of righteousness, and they received him not;" his way was very strict and severe, "he came neither eating nor drinking," was very strict in his diet, and manner of living, of a coarse carriage and melancholy temper, and "they said he had a devil." He was to be a preacher of repentance, and his garb was suitable to his employment. Our Saviour was of a more easy and familiar and conversable temper, suitable to a preacher of pardon and forgiveness: "the Son of man came eating and drinking; and they said, Behold a wine-bibber and a glutton, a friend of publicans and sinners." Now what could be more childish and perverse than to be pleased with nothing? By this it plainly appeared, that whatever garb he had put on, whatever his carriage had been, they would have found fault with it, and have made some exception against it; at this rate it was impossible for him to escape the censure of men so perversely disposed; and therefore our Saviour fitly compares them to "children playing in

the markets," who were neither pleased with mourning nor dancing.

And this is the humour of infidelity, and of those who oppose the truth, to cavil and make exceptions at every thing, and to argue against religion and the principles of it, from contrary topics, and arguments that are inconsistent with one another.

There are other instances of this perverseness in the Jews; as, that when they believed Moses, and had a mighty veneration for him, yet they would not believe him when he testified concerning the Messias. So likewise they looked upon John the Baptist as a prophet; but yet would give no credit to his testimony concerning Christ. Nay, so froward were they, that when our Saviour had wrought the greatest and plainest miracle that could be, in feeding five thousand persons with five loaves and two little fishes; yet, as if this had been nothing, they still call upon him to work a miracle; (John vi. 30.) "What sign workest thou, that we may see and believe?"

IV. Another usual concomitant of infidelity, is obstinacy, and pertinacious persisting in error. This likewise was the temper of the Jews, not to be convinced by any evidence that could be offered to them. When our Saviour had several times put them to silence, so that they were not able to answer him, yet they obstinately persisted in their former conceit, and stiffly held the conclusion, though they were not able to make good the premises. (Matt. xxii.) Our Saviour confuted the Sadducees about the resurrection, and put them to silence; and then undertook the pharisees, and they could not answer him neither; both of them continued in their opinion, though each of them thought the other to be clearly baffled and confuted.

This obstinacy of theirs our Saviour makes a great aggravation of their infidelity; (Matt. xxi. 31, 32.) "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you by the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him. And ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him."

Nay, which was the most unreasonable of all, when they could not answer his arguments, nor deny the miracles which he wrought, yet they were resolved not to believe on him, nor to suffer others to confess him. (John xi. 47,48.) After he had wrought that great miracle, in raising Lazarus from the dead, after he had lain four days in the grave, they were so far from owning themselves convinced by it, that hereupon they took counsel to put him to death. So the text tells us, that "many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus had done (namely, the raising of Lazarus), believed on him: but some of them went their way to the pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done." And now one would have thought, that either they should not have acknowledged this mighty miracle, or, if they had, that they should have been convinced by it that he was from God: but the miracle was so notorious, that they could not deny it; and they were so obstinately set against him, that they would not be convinced by it; they granted the premises, and yet denied the conclusion; (ver. 47.) "Then gathered the chief priests and pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles; if we let him alone all men will believe on him." And it follows, (ver.

53.) " From that day forth they took counsel together to put him to death."

And after he was risen from the dead, and those that bare witness to his resurrection had their testimony confirmed by miracles, yet the Jews continued in the same obstinacy, as if they were resolved to oppose the gospel in despite of all evidence that could be brought for it. So we find (Acts iv. 15, 16.) that when the rulers and scribes beheld the man whom the apostles had healed, standing by them, it is said, " They could say nothing against it." But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, " saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it: but, that it spread no farther among the people, let us straightly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name." What could be more unreasonable, than to own the miracle, and yet to reject the testimony?

V. Another quality which accompanied this spirit of infidelity and opposition to the truth in the Jews, was want of patience to consider and examine what could be said for the truth; a hastiness to pronounce and pass sentence, before they had heard what could be said for it. Thus the pharisees, when they saw our Saviour cast out devils, they presently, without any farther consideration, pronounce, that he did it " by the prince of devils," (Matt. xii. 24.) Had they not been headily carried on by passion and prejudice, they would never have passed this rash sentence. Had they but had patience to have considered matters, they could

not have believed, that the devil was confederate with Christ against himself, and the interest of his own kingdom.

And as it was then, so it is at this day; many continue in unbelief and error, not because there is not evidence enough for the things proposed to their belief, but because they have not patience enough to consider what may be said for them. Nay, in the church of Rome, that they may retain their people in their communion, they strictly forbid all examination of their religion, or so much as to hear or read what can be said against it; because this is doubting, and doubting is next to infidelity, a mortal sin, and a temptation of the devil. There is but one season and nick of time, wherein they will allow any of the people to examine and inquire into matters of religion, and that is, when they would gain a man to their religion, and they allow it then only because they cannot help it. Some reasons they must offer to persuade men to be of their church; and when they offer them, they must allow them to consider them, and judge of the force of them, though they had much rather they would take their words for the strength and goodness of them; for they do what they can to hinder them from advising with those that will dispute the matter with them: or if they cannot prevent examination, yet they divert them as much as they can from any particular inquiry into their doctrines and practices; this they pretend is a tedious and endless course, and therefore they commonly direct them to a shorter way, which is, not to inquire first into the truth of their doctrines, and the goodness of their worship and practice; but first to find out the true church, and then learn of her what doc-

trines and practices are truly Christian; and by this means they get their religion swallowed whole, without any particular examination of their doctrines and practices, which will not bear the trial; and therefore, to make the work short, they take it for granted, that there is always a visible catholic church; that this church is infallible in all matters of faith; and that the Roman church is this visible infallible catholic church, because no other church pretends to be so; as indeed there is no reason why any particular church should pretend to be catholic, or universal; or, to speak plainer, why a part should pretend to be the whole: and all this being admitted, there is nothing more now to be done, but to receive all the doctrines which this church teacheth, without any further examination of them, because this church being supposed to be infallible, all that she says must be true, though it appears to be never so contrary to Scripture, or reason, or sense. But now, in this way of proceeding, there are two or three things which seem to be very odd:—

1. That men must take their religion in a lump, and not be allowed to examine the particular doctrines and practices of it: which is to say, they have an excellent religion, but men must by no means examine it, nor look into it. This looks so suspiciously, that a wise man, for this very reason, if there were no other, would reject it, because they are so afraid to bring it to a trial.

2. It seems likewise very strange, that when they go to make proselytes, they should take so many things which are in question and controversy between us, for granted; as, that the church in every age is infallible, and that the church of Rome is the

infallible and catholic church. They meet indeed sometimes with some easy and willing converts, that will meet them thus far; that is, more than half way: but what if a man will not take all this for granted, but will put them to the proof of it? Why then he is not so civil as they hoped and expected; and commonly they give over tempting him, or at least depart from him for a season, until they can find him in a more pliable temper; for it is a long work, and requires a great deal of time, to prove some things, especially to the dull capacity of a northern heretic: besides that, some things are stubborn, and will not be proved, though never so much pains be taken to do it; and so are the propositions now mentioned, towards the proof whereof I never saw any argument offered, that is within distance, or indeed within sight, of the conclusion. And then,

3. It seems a very strange method of coming to know what the true doctrines of Christianity are, by first knowing which is the true church: for it is not the church which makes the doctrines of Christianity to be true, but the profession of the true Christian doctrine which makes the true church; and therefore we must first know which are the true doctrines of Christianity, the profession whereof makes the true church, before we can possibly know which is the true church; but which are the true doctrines of Christianity is not to be known but by a particular examination of them, and comparing them with the rule of the Christian faith, "the word of God." But they that have a mind to delude men, and keep them in error, must never admit their religion to be tried by this rule. But to proceed.

VI. Another quality which accompanies infidelity and opposition to the truth, is rudeness and boisterousness, falling into uncivil terms and reproachful names. Such was the carriage of the Jews towards our Saviour; when they were not able to reason with him, they fell to railing at him, (John viii. 48.) When he argued against their infidelity in the calmest manner, and, by the strongest and clearest arguments, endeavoured to convince them of the unreasonableness of it: "Which of you (saith he) convinceth me of sin? And if I speak the truth, why do you not believe? He that is of God, heareth God's words; ye, therefore, hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, Say we not well, that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?" They presently call him heretic; for so the Jews esteemed the Samaritans.

VII. Another quality near akin to this, is fury and outrageous passion. (John vii. 23.) The Jews were in a great passion against our Saviour, for healing on the sabbath-day. When the apostles wrought miracles, it is said, that "the high priest, and they that were with him, were filled with indignation." And when St. Stephen preached to them, it is said, "They gnashed on him with their teeth." And St. Paul acknowledgeth of himself, while he opposed the truth of Christianity, he was "mad against all that were of that way."

VIII. And lastly, to mention no more, infidelity and opposition to the truth, is usually attended with bloody and inhuman persecution; a certain argument of a weak cause, and which wants better means of conviction. Thus the Jews treated our Saviour; when they could not deal with him by reason, they persecuted him, and "sought to kill him." (John v.

16. and chap. viii. 59.) When our Saviour had answered all their objections, and they had nothing to reply unto him, "they took up stones to cast at him;" a sign their reasons were spent, and that their arguments were at an end. Thus infidelity and error betrays its own weakness, and want of reason on its side, by making use of such brutish and unreasonable weapons in its own defence. Our blessed Saviour and his apostles never thought of propagating their religion by these inhuman and barbarous ways. These methods are proper to the destroyer, but not to the Lamb of God, and Saviour of men. "The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them;" to do good to the bodies, and to the souls of men; and not to destroy their bodies, no, not in order to the saving of their souls. All the means that he or his apostles used, were teaching and persuading, and that with great meekness: "Learn of me, for I am meek," saith our Lord: and the apostles every where command the teachers of this religion, "to shew all gentleness to all men," and "in meekness to instruct those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth." They did not go about to convert men by armed force, and ways of violence and cruelty. It is a sign that reason runs very low with that religion, which hath no better arguments to persuade men to it, than dragoons and the galleys; these are carnal, and therefore not Christian weapons. So St. Paul tells us, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal," and yet they were "mighty through God, to subdue" a great part of the world to the belief and obedience of the Christian religion. Thus I have done with the fourth particular in the text—the un-

reasonableness of infidelity and opposition to the truth. The two remaining ones I shall dispatch in a few words.

Fifthly, therefore, I observed the true reason and account of men's opposition to the truth, and rejection of it; "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." And, indeed darkness is more suitable to a wicked and vicious life, because the deformity of it is not so easily discovered as in the light; this makes the evil of men's actions more manifest, and their faults more inexcusable. Men may pretend other reasons for their infidelity and opposition of the truth, and may seem to argue against the principles of religion in good earnest, and against the reasonableness and truth of Christianity, from a real contrary persuasion: but no man that hath these things fairly proposed to him, and with all the advantages they are capable of, and hath the patience to consider the true nature and design of the Christian doctrine, but must acknowledge it, not only to be the most reasonable, but the most Divine, most likely to come from God, and to make men like God, of any religion that ever yet appeared in the world. If any man reject it, it is not because he hath good and sufficient reasons against it; but because he is swayed by some unreasonable prejudice and passion, or biassed by some lust or interest, which he is strongly addicted to, and loath to part with, and yet he must part with it, if he entertain this religion, and submit himself to the terms and rules of it. This is that which commonly lies at the bottom of infidelity, and is the true reason of their opposition to the truth—that "their deeds are evil." And it is natural for every man to defend himself, and justify his doings, as well as he can; and if re-

ligion be clearly against him, to set himself with all the despite and malice he can against religion; and to hate, and with all his might to oppose, that which contradicts that course which he is in love with, and is resolved to continue in: for, as our Saviour reasons in a like case, "No man can serve two masters; but either he will hate the one, and love the other; or he will cleave to the one, and quit the other." Men cannot entertain the truth, and retain their lusts; and, therefore, as our Saviour tells us immediately after the text, "Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." The light of truth is as grievous to a bad man, as the light of the sun is to sore eyes: because it lays open and discovers the faults and vices of men, and if they entertain it, will urge them, and put them upon a necessity of reforming their wicked lives; and because they have no mind to this, therefore they resist the light, and endeavour to keep it out. The vices and lusts of men are so many diseases; and men naturally loath physic, and put it off as long as they can: and this makes many inconsiderate and wilful men to favour their disease, and take part with it against all counsel and advice; and when the great Physician of souls comes and offers them a remedy, they slight and reject him, and will rather perish than follow his prescriptions.

And this was the true reason why the Jews rejected the gospel: they were vicious in their lives, and loath to undergo the severity of a cure; they were not willing to be saved by so sharp and unpleasant a remedy. And this is still the true reason at this day, of men's enmity and opposition to religion, because it declares against their evil deeds, and proclaims open war against those vices and lusts

which they love, and are resolved to live in; so that they have no other way to justify themselves and their actions, but by condemning and rejecting that which reproves and finds fault with them.

And here I might shew more particularly, that there are two accounts to be given why bad men are so apt to resist and reject the Divine truth, even when it is revealed and proposed to them in the fairest manner, and with the clearest evidence.

1. Because their minds are not so rightly prepared and disposed for the receiving of Divine truth. And,

2. Because they have an interest against it, their designs and deeds are evil, they have some worldly interest to carry on, or they are in love with some vice or lust which they cannot reconcile with the truths of God and religion. But this I have done at large elsewhere.* I proceed, therefore, to the

Sixth and last particular in the text, namely, The great guilt of those who reject the doctrine of the gospel. By this very act of theirs they are condemned, nay, they condemn themselves; because they reject the only means of their salvation. "This is the condemnation," this very thing argues the height of their folly and guilt, that "when light is come," they prefer darkness before it. If any thing will condemn men, this will; and if any thing will aggravate their condemnation, and make it above measure heavy and intolerable, this will. If it were in a doubtful matter that men made so ill and foolish a choice, the thing would admit of some excuse: but the dispute is between light and darkness. If the Christian religion had not so plainly the advantage

* See Sermons LXXXVI. LXXXVII. LXXXVIII. vol. v. p. 19, &c.

of any other institution that ever was; if that holiness which the gospel commands, and that happiness which it promiseth, were not infinitely to be preferred before the ways of sin and death, the unbeliever and the disobedient might have something to say for themselves; but the case is plainly otherwise: so that whoever, having the Christian religion fairly and fully proposed to him, doth not believe it; or, professing to believe it, doth not live according to it, "hath no cloak for his sin;" neither the one for his infidelity, nor the other for his disobedience: and if any thing will aggravate the condemnation of men, this will; for the greater light men sin against, the greater is their guilt; and the greater any man's guilt is, the heavier will be his doom. The heathen world, that lived for many ages in "darkness and the shadow of death," shall be condemned for sinning against that imperfect knowledge of their duty, which they had from the glimmering of natural light; but they shall be "beaten with few stripes," their punishment shall be gentle in comparison; but what punishment can be severe enough for those obstinate infidels that reject the light, and prefer darkness before it? for those impudent offenders, who admit the light of the gospel, and yet rebel against it; who do the works of darkness in the midst of this light, at noon-day, and in the face of the sun? This consideration the Scripture frequently urgeth upon those who enjoy the light of the gospel. "I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah, (the very worst and wickedest of the heathens) than for you." "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" If either we reject the knowledge of the truth, or sin wilfully after we have received it, (that is, apostatize

either to infidelity or impiety of life) there remains no more sacrifice for sin, nothing but a fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation, to consume the adversary, that is, such implacable enemies of God and his truth; in so doing, we resist and reject our last remedy; and after God hath sent and sacrificed his only Son for our salvation, we cannot in reason think there remains any more sacrifice for sin.—I have gone over the several particulars in the text: I shall only make two or three inferences.

First, If the great design of the Son of God was to enlighten the world with the knowledge of Divine truth, what shall we think of those, who make it their great endeavour to stifle and suppress this light, and to hinder the free communication of it? who conceal the word of life from the people, and lock up the knowledge of salvation, contained in the Holy Scriptures, in an unknown tongue?

Secondly, Having represented the unreasonableness of infidelity, and the evil concomitants of it in the Jews, "Let us take heed lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God, and lest any of us fall after the same example of infidelity." Let us not reject the principles of religion, because they are inconsistent with our practices, but let us rather endeavour to reconcile our lives to the rules of religion, and resolve to reform those faults which religion reproves, and which the reason of our own minds, if we would attend to it, reproves as much as religion; a clear evidence that we are in the wrong, and religion in the right, because it hath the best and soberest reason of mankind on its side.

Let us then, with all readiness of mind, entertain that light which God hath afforded to us, to con-

duct us and shew us the way to happiness, whether by the principles of natural religion, or by the revelation of the gospel in its primitive purity and lustre, and not as it hath been muffled and disguised by the ignorance and superstition which prevailed in after-ages, till the light of the Reformation sprang out, and restored a new day to us, and "called us again out of darkness into a marvellous light," which, by the blessing of God, we have now enjoyed for many years, and which we cannot go about to quench, without incurring the condemnation in the text.

Thirdly, and lastly, Let us take heed of practical infidelity, of opposing and contradicting the Christian religion by our wicked lives and actions. Though we profess to believe the gospel, yet if our "deeds be evil," we do in effect and by interpretation reject it, and "love darkness rather than light;" though we assent to the truth of it, yet we "withhold it in unrighteousness," we resist the virtue and efficacy of it, and do oppose and blaspheme it by our lives; nay, we do as much as in us lies to make others atheists, by exposing religion to the contempt and scorn of such persons, and by opening their mouths against it; as either not containing the laws of a good life, or as destitute of power and efficacy to persuade men to the obedience of those laws. Where (will they say) is this excellent religion, so much boasted of? how does it appear? Look into the lives of Christians, and there you will best see the admirable effects of this doctrine, the mighty force of this institution! And what a shameful reproach is this to us! What a scandal and disparagement to our holy religion, to see some of the worst of men wearing the badge and livery of the

best religion and institution that ever was in the world!

I shall conclude all with the words of the apostle, (Phil. i. 27.) "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ;" and "stand fast with one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel."

END OF VOL. IX.

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